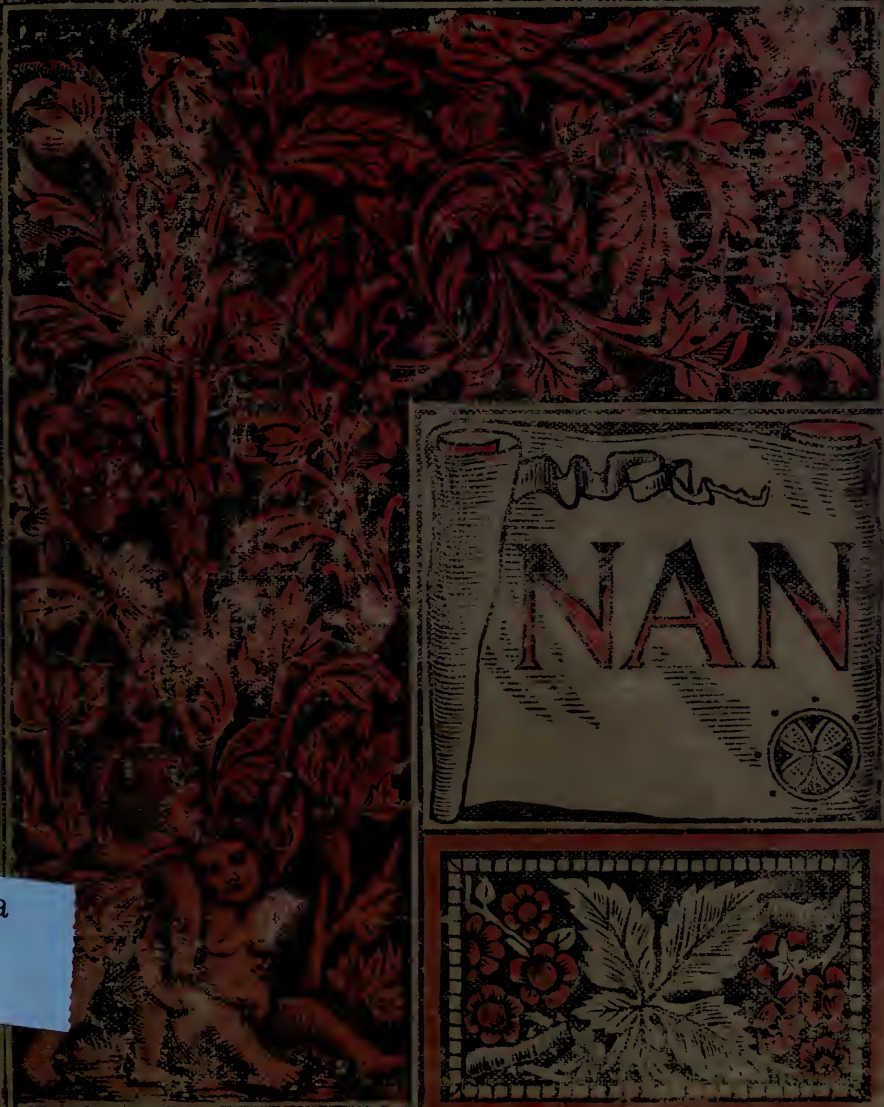


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“IF YOU TELL OF ME YOU WILL KILL ME.”—[Page 159.]

N A N

BY

LUCY C. LILLIE

AUTHOR OF "MILDRED'S BARGAIN AND OTHER STORIES"

Illustrated

NEW YORK


HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE

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1883

TO

NAN'S FIRST FRIEND

MY DEAR GOD-DAUGHTER

JENNY PAULINE



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N A N.

CHAPTER I.

“If a man had eight quarts of wine in one measure and three in another—”

Nan announced so much of a problem in her arithmetic, and then stopped with a little groan of despair.

“Well?” said her cousin Marian, turning around from the window.

“Oh, *dear!*” sighed Nan, “what’s the use of lessons any way? and if we don’t go down town soon, we won’t be home for tea.”

“What if we’re not?” said the third inmate of the room, a boy of about thirteen, who was lounging on the sofa. “But hurry up, Nan; there’s no use grumbling.” Nan planted her elbows more firmly into the table, clutched each side of her curly head with a pair of firm brown hands, and returned to the question of the man and his wine.

Marian watched the thin, drizzling rain on the garden-beds, and Philip read his Robinson Crusoe, regardless of the disorder of shells and minerals about him. For the matter of that, no one of the three young people took special heed of his or her surroundings. Marian did not care; Philip had a boy's feeling that he could not help untidiness, and Nan had, after two years' residence there, grown accustomed to the dingy shabbiness and vulgar disorder of her step-aunt's house in Bromfield.

The room was a nondescript one, above a cheese and butter store. It was half sitting-room, half parlor, and, as long as Nan had known it, the furniture had been the same, except that the wear and tear of time had made the chairs and table more rickety, the holes in the carpet more dangerous to incautious walkers, and the drawers of the big side-board or press more uncertain in their way of moving in and out. The room overlooked the main street of Bromfield, and, as I have said, was directly above the store kept by Nan's step-aunt, Mrs. Rupert. A rather dark corridor outside led to a rickety staircase. Below was only a small room off the store, and a kitchen, while above the family were crowded into three sleeping-rooms.

When Nan first came to live with the Ruperts, she was painfully observant of the things about her; but time had made many of the disagreeables seem natural, although

even now any one could read in the bright, sweet face of my little heroine something more delicate and refined than her surroundings.

Just what Nan Rolf looked like at thirteen it is hard to tell you. Sitting at the table on this gray rainy day, she seemed to be the only bright spot in the room. Marian was a head taller than Nan. She was a pretty, rosy girl, in spite of her cramped life, and certainly would develop into a handsome woman. But no one could have predicted anything so definitely of little Nan. Her face was interesting, but not pretty; the features were irregular, the hazel eyes were full of a certain earnest sweetness, and though her mouth was rather wide, her smile was bright and dimpling, and her teeth white and even. Perhaps if Nan's hair had been in order, her clothes tidy and well-fitting, if she should cross a room without awkwardness, she might have looked attractive to any one. As it was, only those who cared to look a second time caught the real spirit of the child's face, the fearless honesty in her glance, the sweetness that made up for much lack of repose in her face and manner.

Nan herself would have laughed gayly at the thought of any one counting up her attractions, or indeed of their bestowing five minutes' reflection upon her. Such as she was, she had grown up more like a little wild-flower, sharing what others around her had to offer, coming in for scold-

ings and pettings, the former predominating, no doubt, but never thinking much of her own individuality. Her step-aunt, Mrs. Rupert, was a widow with four children, the eldest of whom was Marian; and, young as she was, Nan appreciated the kindness that offered her a home when her parents died; for Nan had never seen her—indeed, had scarcely heard of her, for the tie was not one of blood. Mrs. Rupert's mother had married, a second time, Nan's grandfather, himself a widower with one little girl, later Nan's mother. The half-sisters had rarely met, for, before Mrs. Rolf was out of school, her step-sister had made a marriage far beneath her, and removed to Bromfield. Mrs. Rolf married, a few years later, a young lawyer, reputed to be very well off in this world's goods; but she knew at the time that he had quarrelled with his grandfather, from whom he had expected a fortune—and so it chanced that little Nan came into the world, and had lived her thirteen years in it, knowing no real relations. When her mother's death left her a penniless orphan, Mrs. Rupert came forward and took the child to her own home. Mrs. Rupert had made an ineffectual effort, it is true, to reach some of Nan's paternal relations; and even now the child was frequently puzzled by hearing her aunt speak to others of her "having those belonging to her as rolled in money." Who or where they were, Nan often wondered in a vague, childish

way, but could not tell. Her mother had died too suddenly to leave her any directions, and her father Nan only remembered dimly. Keen as were her instincts of refinement, and isolated as she often felt, yet little Nan could look forward to no future which should be brighter than Marian's. Philip was a boy: he, Nan liked to think, could go out into the world and carve his own career; but for her, she felt sure it could only be the butter shop; the crowded little rooms; and the children always needing to be cared for in some fashion, from morning until night.

CHAPTER II.

"THERE!" exclaimed Nan, jumping up; "*that* old thing's done at last. Come on, Marian! come, Philip!"

"Don't knock everything over," growled Philip, slowly getting on his feet, while Marian put on her hat and jacket before a cracked mirror hung between the windows. Nan never required to see herself when she dressed. She was only a minute getting into an old woollen coat, and fastening a felt hat down over her wavy locks, after which she began a vain search for her gloves.

"There's mother calling," exclaimed Marian. "It's for you, Nan."

Nan heard the voice sounding down the hall, and darted out, while Philip uttered another exclamation of disgust.

Nan never could overcome her dislike to the shop. She could hardly have told you *why* it was, but the butter and cheese and eggs in which Mr. Rupert dealt were unpleasant to her, and, as she ran down the dark hall, it was with a little shiver of dislike and of dread lest her aunt wanted her to "mind" the shop during her absence. Marian rather liked

to perform this office, but Nan could never see any "fun" in it, and was always ready enough to change places with her cousin, on holidays, when they were all day at home. Before Nan reached the shop-door, she heard voices in pleasant though shrill tones, and, going in, was a little startled by seeing a fashionably dressed young lady in earnest conversation with her aunt.

It was a scene Nan never forgot; the twilight of the cold spring day was just falling, and her aunt's stout figure, bending above a cheese, was in strong contrast to that of her visitor, a tall, slender young lady in a rich dress of dark silk, with beautiful furs and long-wristed gray gloves. She had a handsome, delicate face, a little disdainful in expression, but very refined, and, as Nan entered, she turned lovely blue eyes towards her.

Nan half drew back, with her hand still on the door.

"Come in, child!" said her aunt, in her most excited tones. "Don't hang back that way. Here's a lady wants particular to see you."

"To see *me*!" Nan gasped; she had never in her life had a special visitor before—but the stranger made things easy at once for her. She went up to little Nan, holding out one of her beautifully gloved hands.

"How do you do, my dear?" she said in a soft, sweet voice. "I am your second cousin Phyllis."

"You—I—" she began, and felt as if the little shop, cheeses and all, was dancing about her. Could this beautiful lady be one of those who were "rolling in money?"

"Yes, dear," said the lady again, "I have come especially to see you." She turned to Mrs. Rupert, who was still standing with a knife plunged into the cheese, and staring as hard as Nan could at the visitor. "Perhaps I had better call again in the morning—there is so much to say; and it is late now."

"Oh 'm!" began Mrs. Rupert. "I'm sure we'd be glad enough to see you any time—perhaps it might be well tomorrow. Where was it you said you was staying?"

"At Mrs. Grange's," the lady answered, looking again at little bewildered Nan. "My name is Miss Rolf, and I live at Beverley." The name made Mrs. Rupert's heart jump. Beverley was the town in which Nan's grandfather had lived and died. Surely this meant *something*; just what, Mrs. Rupert hardly knew.

"Well, Nan Rolf!" she said, as soon as the lady had departed. "There's fortune in the wind for *you*; just you wait and see."

"Oh, aunt Lydia!" exclaimed Nan. "I wonder *what* it can be?" But Mrs. Rupert could say no more; she could only look wise and shake her head, while Nan darted away to give Marian and Philip her wonderful piece of news.



"I AM YOUR SECOND COUSIN."

CHAPTER III.

NAN's visitor, Miss Rolf, left the little shop and walked away in the winter's dusk, up the main street and down one of the more secluded streets, where the "upper ten" of Bromfield lived. Bromfield was a large, dull town, full of factories and smoke, and a general air of business and money-making. The houses on the pretty street to which Miss Rolf directed her steps seemed to be shut away from all the dust and noise of the town, and Mrs. Grange's gateway was the finest and most exclusive-looking one in the row. Miss Rolf went in the gate, past a pretty lawn dotted with cedars, to the side entrance of a long, low, stone house, within the windows of which lights were already twinkling. She had a curious, amused smile on her face as she went down the hall, and it had not faded when she entered the parlor fronting the garden and the lawn.

Three people were seated in the firelight—an elderly lady with a pale, sweet face, a tall boy of fifteen, and a gentleman whose face was like Miss Rolf's in regularity of feature, but much softer in expression.

In the luxurious room Miss Rolf looked much more in her place than in Mr. Rupert's butter-shop, and if Nan could have seen her "second cousin Phyllis" there, she would have been more than ever certain that she belonged to those who had the money.

Miss Rolf was greeted by all three occupants of the room at once.

"Well, Phyllis?"—from the gentleman.

"Did you see her?"—this from the boy.

"Well, what happened?"—this from the lady.

Miss Rolf sank into one of the many easy-chairs, and, leaning back, began to draw off her long gloves.

"Yes! I saw her," she answered, smiling. "It was really very interesting. Quite like something in a story. There was the horrible little store, and Mrs. Rupert, a vulgar sort of woman; and then the little girl came in—dreadfully untidy and dowdy-looking, but really not at all so common as I feared; she has the hazel eyes every one admired so in her father."

"And did you tell her her aunt Letitia wants her to go to Beverley?" said the boy eagerly.

"No, I didn't," rejoined Miss Rolf. "I thought I'd do that when I went to-morrow, and I wanted to see the child alone first."

"Why not send for her to come here?" Mrs. Grange said gently.

“Not a bad idea,” said Miss Rolf, sitting upright. “She might come to-morrow, instead of my going there.”

“I can’t help thinking Letitia will regret it,” said the gentleman, who was Miss Rolf’s father.

“Why should she, papa?” said the boy quickly. “Surely, it is only fair; her father was left out of Cousin Harris’s will, just for a mere caprice, and why should Cousin Letty have everything and this child nothing? I don’t see the justice of that.”

“But to remove her from a low condition; to place her among people she never knew—I am afraid it is unwise,” said Mr. Rolf, shaking his head. “You don’t understand it, Lance; I don’t expect you to. Just wait and see my words come true.”

Lance, or Lancelot Rolf, laughed brightly. He seemed quite prepared to take the risks on Miss Letitia Rolf’s venture. While Miss Rolf wrote her letter to little Nan, the boy watched her earnestly. He was intensely interested in this new-found cousin, and, had he known where to go, would certainly have paid a visit to the cheesemonger’s family himself.

He would have found an excited little party had he done so, for by eight o’clock Mrs. Rupert had indulged in every possible speculation about Nan’s future. Mr. Rupert, a tall, thin, weatherbeaten man, had come in for tea, and was

told of the visitor, and obliged to hear all Mrs. Rupert's ideas and hopes on the subject, while Nan herself was the only quiet member of the party. She sat at the tea-table, for once in her life very quiet and repressed. Just what she hoped or thought, she could not have told you : but suddenly it seemed to her as if something like her old life with her parents might be coming back ! Could it be she was to go away, and leave Bromfield, the cheeses and butter and eggs, her aunt's loud voice, Marian's little airs of superiority, and Phil's rough kindness, forever behind her ?

"Come, Nan, you may as well help with the tea-things, if you *are* going to see your rich relations," said her aunt's voice sharply, recalling her to her duties, and Marian laughed scornfully.

"I don't suppose we'll know Nan, or she us, by to-morrow night," she said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Early the next morning a man-servant from Mrs. Grange's brought a note for Nan, which she read in the little, untidy parlor, surrounded by all the family. It was from Miss Rolf, requesting Nan to come as soon as possible to Mrs. Grange's house, and it produced a new flutter in the household. Nan was dressed by Mrs. Rupert and Marian, in everything that either of the girls' scanty wardrobes possessed worth putting on for such a visit ; and, had she but known it, a much simpler toilet would have been far more



"NAN WAS DRESSED BY MRS. RUPERT AND MARIAN."



appropriate and becoming, for her purple merino dress and Marian's red silk necktie, her "best" hat with its green feathers, and Mrs. Rupert's soiled lavender kid gloves, were a very dreadful combination; and Nan, as she walked up Main street, did not feel entirely satisfied with the costume herself. If her head had not been so dazed by what the Ruperts already called her "good-fortune," she would have felt it all more keenly; as it was, she went into Mrs. Grange's gate-way feeling herself in a dream, and wondering how and where she would wake up.

CHAPTER IV.

NAN was admitted by a very grave-looking man-servant, who on hearing her name led her down the softly carpeted hall, and up-stairs to the door of a cosy little sitting-room where Miss Rolf was waiting for her. The many luxuries of the room; its brightness and air of refinement, made Nan half-afraid to go farther, and suddenly she seemed to feel the vulgarity of her own dress; but her "second cousin," Miss Rolf, smiled very pleasantly upon her from the window, and, coming up to the little girl, kissed her affectionately.

Miss Rolf in the morning light, and in a long dress of pale gray wool, looked to Nan like nothing less than a princess. She was apparently about twenty one or two, with a fair face, soft waves of blonde hair, and eyes that looked to Nan like stars—they were so bright and yet soft with all their sparkle. Nan scarcely noticed the imperious curve of her new cousin's pretty mouth, or the disdainful pose of the head. She thought of nothing then but her beauty and grace and charming manners.

"Well, my dear," this dazzling princess said, "take off your hat and cloak and sit down by the fire. I want to have a talk with you." Nan, very much subdued by everything she saw about her, obeyed, while Miss Rolf seated herself in a low chair and looked at her little cousin critically.

"Now, Nan," she said, gravely, "do you know that your father would have been a very rich man but for an absurd quarrel with his elder brother?"

"I knew there was something," said Nan, who was afraid of her own voice.

"Well, then," continued Miss Rolf, "when your grandfather died, he left everything to his elder son and daughter. The son, your uncle Harris, is a confirmed invalid—indeed, he is not altogether right in his mind—but your aunt Letitia, your father's older sister, is strong and well, and they live together at Beverley. Miss Letitia has suddenly taken it into her head to hunt you up, and, as my father and I were coming here on a visit, she asked me to try and find you."

Miss Rolf paused, and Nan, who sat very still, her hazel eyes fixed on the young lady's face, nodded, and said in a sort of whisper, "Thank you."

"Your aunt," continued Phyllis, smiling pleasantly, "told me that I was to invite you, in her name, to come on a visit to Beverley. Mind, Nan, don't get it into your head

that it is more than a visit—unless you prove so nice and pleasant a little visitor that she will want you to stay always.”

Nan’s face broke into a smile that made her really pretty.

“I’ll try and be pleasant,” she said, brightly.

“So you would like to go?” said Miss Phyllis, looking at her earnestly. “Wouldn’t you miss—the Ruperts?”

Nan’s face flushed.

“Yes,” she said, looking down, “I shall miss aunt—and Philip.”

Miss Phyllis said nothing for a moment. She had more to tell, but she thought it as well not to say it now. She had taken a sudden fancy to Nan; she wanted the child to come to Beverley, and perhaps, if she told her all, Nan would refuse: at least, looking at the child’s honest, fearless eyes, she felt it more prudent to say no more. So Nan was told that she was to go, if she liked, in a week to her grandfather’s and her father’s old home.

“Your aunt thought,” said Miss Phyllis, “that you might need some new clothes. You see you will have to dress more at her house than here in Bromfield, and so we will take a week to get you ready. Perhaps it would be as well for you to stay here to-day, and go out with me.”

Nan’s eyes danced! Never but once since she lived in Bromfield had she owned an entirely new dress. Every-

thing she wore had been "made over" from Mrs. Rupert's or Marian's, and she faintly understood that new clothes of Miss Phyllis's buying would be something unthought-of in the Rupert mind.

"I'll leave you here a little while, Nan," said the young lady, "and you can amuse yourself with the books and papers."

But Nan needed nothing of the kind. When the door was closed, she uttered a little half-scream of delight, and jumped up, walking over to the window, where she looked out at the dull town lying smoky and hazy in the distance, and which she felt sure she was leaving forever! She hardly heard Miss Phyllis returning, and felt startled by the sound of her voice saying, "Nan, are you ready?" And there was the beautiful young lady in her furs and broad-brimmed hat, with a purse and a little note-book in her hand, ready to lead Nan into the first scene of her enchantment.

CHAPTER V.

NAN thought that the delight of this day never could be equalled by anything life would bring, even at Beverley. To begin with, she and Miss Phyllis started out in a most luxurious carriage, which rolled them through the town, past the butter-shop, where Mrs. Rupert was standing in the door-way, and finally deposited them at Mr. Lennon's large store, into which Nan had never gone half so proudly before.

"You needn't appear to recognize any one, Nan," Miss Phyllis said, just as they went in; and this dashed Nan's spirits just a little, for Mary Seymour, one of the girls in the millinery room, was a particular friend of her aunt's; but then Miss Phyllis must know best, thought Nan, and she would trust to luck keeping Mary out of their way.

Everybody was most obsequious to Miss Rolf; and when she said quietly, "I want to see your handsomest dresses, ready made, for this little girl," Nan could hardly move to follow them up-stairs; and there, out of a long case, dress after dress was taken, held up, tried on, examined, and criti-

cised by Miss Phyllis, who sat languidly with her purse and her note-book, evidently quite regardless of expense—of prices that took Nan's breath away. It was well *her* opinion was not asked, for she would never have dared to choose what Miss Phyllis did for her, a soft seal-brown wool costume, handsomely trimmed with silk, and with a jacket to match. Miss Phyllis quietly desired Nan to put these garments on; and when the saleswoman brought her back from the dressing-room, her cousin could not repress a smile of satisfaction; and really, little Nan did credit to the quiet, ladylike costume. Miss Phyllis saw a great many possibilities in the child's bright face and pretty, slender figure.

The hat question came next—and here Nan's joy was somewhat dampened by her fear that Mary Seymour would appear and claim acquaintance, and thereby annoy Miss Phyllis; and sure enough, while she was trying on a beautiful brown felt hat, with a scarlet wing in it, Mary Seymour's voice was heard cheerily, from across the room.

"Why, Nan Rolf!" she was saying, "is that you?"

And then Nan saw that her princess could look very differently on different occasions. She turned a cold little stare upon poor Mary, and then said, in a tone perfectly audible to the shop-girl:

"Who is that, Annice?" Now it was the first time Nan had been called by her full name since her father died, and

between the start it gave her, and her little worry about Mary Seymour, she hardly knew what to say, and stood looking guiltily at her aunt's friend, with a rush of color in her face.

"It is Mary Seymour," she said in a low voice.

Miss Phyllis waited a moment, the cold look still on her face; then she took Nan by the hand, and went across the room to where Mary was busy putting bonnet-frames into a drawer.

"My little cousin is going away from Bromfield," she said, smiling, but speaking in the very chilliest tone. "Perhaps you had better say good-bye to her now. She is going to live with her aunt at Beverley."

Poor Mary stared at the beautiful young lady, and said nothing for a moment; then she stooped down and kissed Nan's little red cheek heartily.

"Well, good-luck go with you, Nannie dear," she said; and, half understanding the impression Miss Rolf wished to make, she added, looking up with a sad smile: "I suppose it won't do to expect you to remember us any more, but Tommy'll miss you dreadfully."

"I'll write him a letter, Mary!" Nan exclaimed, and seeing Miss Rolf's look of surprise turn to something like disgust, she added, "Tommy is Mary's lame little brother."

Miss Phyllis said nothing, but led the way back to the



NAN PRESENTED TO MISS PHYLLIS FOR APPROVAL.

hats, and Nan, unable to restrain herself further, whispered : "Miss Rolf—Cousin Phyllis, why did you say I was going to *live* at Beverley, when it is only a visit?"

Miss Phyllis bit her lip angrily. "Never mind," was all she answered; and then the brown felt hat was chosen, and the purchases went on—gloves, and boots, and some dainty under-linen, and various small belongings, until finally all that remained on Miss Phyllis's list was a dressing-case and a trunk. Nan hardly knew which of the beautiful cases to choose, when her cousin left it to her; but finally a black leather one with silver fastenings was selected, and Miss Phyllis directed the shopman to have Nan's initials, *A. B. R.*, put on it in little silver letters.

By this time Nan, in her new brown suit, with her hands in three-button kid gloves, had begun to think she never, never could do justice to the day to Philip and Marian, and yet a something had stolen over her of half-repugnance to going back to the shop. Already she dreaded her aunt's voice, the noisy, greasy tea-table, where only Philip made things endurable for her; so that when, as they left the last store, loading the carriage with parcels, and Miss Phyllis said, "I'm going to keep you for the night, Nan," my little heroine felt more than ever grateful and happy.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. GRANGE received Nan very cordially when she made her appearance with Miss Rolf. The gentle little lady was quite a revelation to Nan, whose ideas of elderly people were formed entirely on the noisy, over-worked matrons she had seen at Mrs. Rupert's. Nan was only allowed a few words with her hostess, and then Miss Rolf carried her off to the little sitting-room up-stairs, where, when she had laid aside her hat and jacket, Miss Rolf told her she had better write Mrs. Rupert a note to explain her absence.

"And I want you to word it very carefully, Nan," said Phyllis, coming up to the little girl with a very serious expression. "You know things are changed with you now, and you must begin at once to let your aunt and her family understand that you are not—they cannot expect you, to treat them quite as equals."

Nan was still full of the excitement and exhilaration of her good-fortune; yet as Phyllis spoke, looking down gravely upon her, there came a blush of mortification into the child's

honest face. A tinge of the same color deepened in Phyllis's soft cheeks for just half a moment, but she said very decidedly :

"Now, Nan, you are not going to be a foolish, obstinate child, I hope; surely you must know that I and your aunt Letitia understand these things better than a little girl brought up among vulgar people could. Now, there must be no nonsense, my dear."

Phyllis's tone was kind, but something in it made Nan see that she expected obedience; and was she not in every way the most wonderful and beautiful creature Nan had ever seen? Nan's doubts vanished while Phyllis laid out note-paper and pen and ink on a dainty little table drawn up to one of the windows; and, when Nan placed herself there to write, her cousin sat down by the fire, with her slippered toes on the fender, and her pretty hands, sparkling with rings, folded gracefully in her lap.

"Now, Nan," she said, "begin your letter. Date it, 'The Willows,' that is the name of this place. 'March 8. Dear Mrs. Rupert.'"

Nan smiled quickly.

"Why — Miss — Cousin Phyllis," she said, looking up from the paper; "she would think me crazy: she is Aunt Rebecca you know."

Miss Rolf's delicate eyebrows drew together in a little

frown. She waited a moment, and then, with an impatient sigh, said:

“Very well, let it go—‘Dear Aunt Rebecca.’”

Nan’s pen scratched on, with many splutterings, for penmanship was her weak point, and had not been considered a very necessary accomplishment in the Rupert household. She looked up presently for further instructions.

“My Cousin Phyllis,” dictated that young lady, “has decided that I had better remain with her until I go to Beverley.” (“Oh!” ejaculated Nan)—“My aunt, Miss Rolf, has invited me to make her a long visit, and as, previous to my going, there are many things to be attended to in my wardrobe, etc., my Cousin Phyllis thinks it best to keep me with her. I shall, of course, see you all before I leave.”

Nan’s pen finally came to a stop.

“That is all,” said Phyllis placidly.

“Then I’ll just send my love, I suppose,” said Nan.

After a little pause, Phyllis said “Yes,” and Nan went to work again. When she brought the letter to her cousin for inspection, this is how it was concluded:

“I hope you are all well, and that you’ll tell Mary Seymour when you see her, I’ll go there before I leave, and I’ll write to Tommy; and tell Marian, please, I’ll give her and Philip all the peanuts that are in my drawer, and I’ll write

them everything that happens at Beverley. I hope uncle's jaw is better. Your loving niece, Nan."

Phyllis Rolf read the letter with so quiet an air that for a moment Nan felt much relieved, feeling sure it was all right; but the first words startled her.

"That would not do, my dear, at all," Phyllis said coldly. "You can *not* go to see this Tommy Seymour, and you had better understand at once that your aunt will not like you to write everything to your cousins here. Now, Nan, do you see what I mean?"

Nan began to see a little more clearly, yet her mind was not yet made up: still, enough of Phyllis's meaning reached her to bring two large tears to her eyes. They rolled down her cheeks, while she looked silently at Phyllis and her letter.

"Don't be silly, my dear," said the young lady, standing up and smiling good-naturedly. "There, finish your letter with just your love; that will be the best way."

And so Nan went back to the little table, brushing away those first tears, and quietly obeyed her cousin. Miss Rolf took the letter from her as soon as it was finished, and went out of the room, while Nan sat still, wondering if Beverley would be quite *all* she hoped for.

Enough excitement remained to make it easy for Phyllis to control her as she wished, and that young lady trusted to time and absence working wonders. While Nan was sit-

ting absorbed in her thoughts, the door opened, and Lance Rolf came suddenly into the room. He was a tall boy, with a spare, handsome face, delicate as Phyllis's in feature, but olive-tinted, and with more sweetness in the brown eyes and the lines of the mouth. He came up to Nan, holding out his hand with a pleasant smile.

"And are you Nan?" he said, looking at her earnestly.

"Yes," was Nan's timid answer.

"Well," said the boy cheerfully, "we are cousins. My name is Lancelot Rolf. I hope we'll be very well acquainted. So you are going to Beverley?"

"Yes," was all Nan could contrive to say again. She longed to ask a dozen questions of the bright, cheerful-looking boy, who, although no older than Philip, looked so *very* much like a little gentleman.

"Shall you like to go?" Lance said, presently.

Nan really felt she couldn't go on saying "yes" to everything, and so with a great effort she said:

"I want to go very much. Is it—is it nice there?"

"It's a jolly old house, where you are going," said Lance, "but I don't know whether you'll enjoy it much, it's so slow, so stupid. Still, perhaps you're not accustomed to much fun." Lance could hardly imagine the cheesemonger's family as very entertaining.

"Oh yes! we have a great deal of fun sometimes," said

Nan, gaining confidence. "In winter we coast and skate, and in summer there are always picnics, and sometimes a circus."

"But at home—wasn't there ever any fun at home?"

Nan could not remember anything which impressed her as particularly enjoyable in-doors.

"No," she said, slowly, "I don't think there was. Marian always liked to tend the shop, but I never cared so much for that. I didn't like the smell of the cheeses, don't you know."

"It was a cheese-shop?" Lance looked very much interested.

"Cheese and butter, and eggs and hams." Nan recited the list glibly.

"Well," said Lancelot very gravely, "there won't be anything like that at Beverley; and see here, Nan, I'll just give you a friendly hint. I don't think I'd talk much about the shop before Cousin Letitia. You see, she might not like it—don't be *ashamed* of it," added the boy, flushing a little; "I don't mean you to be *mean* about it—only you won't need to *talk of it*."

Nan felt that she had begun to put her old life behind her when she was arrayed in the brown cashmere, and now little by little she was learning to feel as the people around her felt: that, after all, she would be expected to act and

appear and think very differently about everything as soon as she was in Beverley.

“What do *you* do?” said Nan, looking brightly at her new acquaintance. “Do you live at Beverley?”

Lance nodded.

“When I’m home,” he said. “I come to school near here at Barnabas Academy. When I’m home I live quite near to where you’re going to be. Oh, I do lots of things! boys are so different from girls. I’m captain of our baseball club, for one thing, and we are jolly good cricketers too, I tell you. At home I do all sorts of things. Phyllis and I are great chums: Phyllis is a regular brick.” He might have said more, but that at this moment Phyllis reappeared. Nan looked at her a little anxiously. She wondered if she was going to feel offended with her about the note; but the young lady was perfectly cheerful, and even kissed Nan when she said, “Now, dear, we will go down to supper. Mrs. Grange is waiting.”

CHAPTER VII.

NAN spent the next week in a perfect whirl. Had anything been left to her discretion, or her power of decision, even, I am afraid the result would have worried Miss Phyllis Rolf very much; but that young lady took everything very calmly into her own hands, and Nan soon learned to find it both an easy and an agreeable task to obey her.

Naturally, Nan wanted to go and see the Ruperts, but this visit was postponed day after day; and finally it was Mrs. Rupert who, with Marian, broke the ice and came up to see Nan.

It happened in this way. Breakfast and prayers were over in Mrs. Grange's house. Nan had, as usual, established herself in the window-seat of the little sitting-room upstairs with a book, and was wondering what new excitement the day would bring forth, when, on looking up from the page before her, she saw two figures enter the gate. In an instant she recognized Mrs. Rupert and Marian.

Only three times in her life could she remember having seen her aunt so gorgeously attired, so that she knew Mrs.

Rupert felt this to be an important occasion; but, after spending even a week with Mrs. Grange and Phyllis, how gaudy Mrs. Rupert's shawl and bonnet looked! Nan involuntarily shuddered, and then—whether it was a half-lonesome or half-ashamed feeling she could not tell—she began to cry.

Lance was out in the hall pulling some mechanical toy he had bought to pieces. Nan dashed out to him.

“My aunt and Marian are here!” she exclaimed.

Lance's eyes fairly danced.

“Oh, *what* fun!” he said. “I'd give a dollar to see Phyllis meet them.”

“But, Lance,” said Nan, “it isn't—such fun—” She scarcely knew what to say, and turned around as she saw some one coming up the staircase. It was Phyllis. She came over to the two children, and said very gravely:

“Nan, I want you to come down-stairs and see your aunt; and”—Phyllis looked earnestly at the child—“I hope you remember all I have said? There must be *no* offer of intimacy.”

Nan stood very still, looking up into Phyllis's beautiful, haughty face.

“Yes,” she said in a low tone, nodding her head gravely.

“See”—Phyllis looked carefully at her dress. “Come in here and put on something else.”

To Nan dressing had become a perfect delight, for never before had she thought of owning such clothes. She followed Phyllis into her room, and waited while that young lady turned over various things. In the course of the week, four new dresses had come home for Nan, besides the brown cashmere, and from these Phyllis, with a little laugh, chose the brightest and prettiest—indeed, the only silk one among them—a soft blue silk, made simply enough, but richer than anything Nan had ever thought of as her own. It seemed odd to wear her best dress in the morning; yet, as Nan followed her cousin down-stairs, she felt a thrill of pleasure to think her aunt and Marian should see her splendor.

Mrs. Rupert, with her daughter, was sitting in the long parlor. They had come determined to reproach little Nan with neglect of them—indeed, if need be, to say something harsh to that fine young lady, Miss Rolf; but the elegance and quiet of the long room, with its pictures and books and soft hangings, quite overcame them. They sat very still on the edge of their chairs, looking at each other and at the door, and only raising their voices to whispers. Marian, if the truth were known, was inclined to be rather defiant when Nan appeared, but Mrs. Rupert kept looking at her menacingly every time she gave her head a pert little toss.

“Keep quiet!” she said, just as Nan and Miss Rolf appeared; and then she looked up, and on seeing Nan come up

the beautiful room in her blue silk dress, with lace in her neck and sleeves, and shining kid boots, and her hair prettily brushed, she drew a long breath, and exclaimed:

“Well, by the powers above, be that Nan Rolf?”

Even the fine house and the beautiful Miss Phyllis were forgotten. Mrs. Rupert sat still, staring at her little step-niece, and it was Phyllis who came to every one’s relief.

“Sit down, Annice,” she said in her gentlest tone; and then, smiling very affably, she continued: “You see, Mrs. Rupert, I could not very well let Nan go away; there were so many things to get for her; her life is going to be such a busy one, studying and all that”—here Phyllis just glanced at Nan’s fine dress; “there would, I knew, be no time to buy her things in Beverley.”

There was a pause, and then Miss Rolf continued, “Nan, take your cousin up-stairs. I will talk to Mrs. Rupert.”

And Nan obeyed. She and Marian found very little to say to each other in the luxurious sitting-room up-stairs. Marian was still defiant, and Nan was nervous and perplexed; so they talked of very uninteresting things, and Nan could hardly put anything into words. She asked for Philip, and begged that he might come and see her.

“I don’t like to go out without Cousin Phyllis’s permission,” she faltered.

Marian burst out laughing.

“Oh, you’re a fine lady now, Nan!” she said; “too good for us, *that’s* easily seen,” and she gave Nan’s dress a twitch.

Nan hardly knew what to say. She was neither ungrateful nor hard-hearted, but she was bewildered and perplexed. It was a relief when Phyllis sent for her. Even when Mrs. Rupert and Marian said good-bye, she did not know what to say, and so she said nothing; but she cried as she kissed her aunt, even though she saw Phyllis was annoyed by it.

And no more was said of her going to visit the Ruperts, that morning being the only good-bye attempted.

CHAPTER VIII.

No one must suppose that Nan did not regret leaving her aunt's family with so little ceremony. She really longed to spend a whole day with them, but, by the time she had been ten days at "The Willows," she had learned to do just what Phyllis told her was best, without thinking much for herself. Only once did she resent her cousin's authority, and that was when she was told by Phyllis she ought not to talk so much of Philip to Lance.

"But I could only talk *good* of my Cousin Philip," Nan said a little defiantly.

"No doubt," rejoined Phyllis with perfect good-humor; "but Lance can't know such a boy; and, Nan, Lance has some low tastes of the kind, as it is."

And then Nan flashed out.

"Oh, Cousin Phyllis!" she exclaimed, "how dare you! Philip is not low—he could not be! He is better—far, far kinder and smarter—and *everything*—even than Lance, who will, I suppose, one day be a fine gentleman!"

And, in spite of Phyllis's set, stern look, Nan dashed out

of the room and into her own little cosy nest, where she stopped, panting for breath. It was Sunday night. She was to leave the next day for Beverley, and, sitting on her little bed, she determined, come what would, to see Philip and bid him good-bye for herself. But how could it be accomplished? Of course she was not a prisoner; but she hardly felt it right to do anything she knew Phyllis would have peremptorily forbidden. Still, her cheeks burned at the thought of what Philip might say of her, if he knew she had left forever with not one word to her old playfellow! And then came the remembrance of all Philip's kindness: how many times he had saved her a scolding—even a whipping; the books he had bought her with his hardly earned pocket-money. Looking back, all her few luxuries or pleasures seemed to have come through her cousin's goodness and unselfishness; "not that he hasn't been horrid and cross enough sometimes," thought little Nan, sitting on the edge of her bed, and allowing her tears to fall on her "second-best" dress quite unchecked. "But he *always* was good to me, *really*," and this decision seemed to put an end to any idea of what she owed to Phyllis. She rose up very softly, and took out her new hat and jacket, and put them on. Then, with one glance at Phyllis's open door, she rushed swiftly down the hall, and the back staircase, whence she knew it would be easy to make her escape. It was about

seven o'clock. People were slowly going on their way to church. Nan thought she would risk finding Philip at home, for Mrs. Rupert never left the house and store entirely alone, and it was usually Marian whom her mother decided to take with her in the evening. She had a general idea that Philip, being a boy, might get into mischief if he went out in the evening, and to Philip these hours of solitude with his minerals and shells and books were most welcome.

Nan sped along the well-known streets as fast as she dared, and reached the butter-and-cheese store with a sense of relief, for thus far all was right. A solitary light was burning in the little sitting-room, where she had sat for the last time only ten days before; yet how long ago it seemed! Nan stood still a moment in the garden, and then, going up to the side-door, slowly turned the handle. She went along the short corridor, and very gently opened the sitting-room door. She had guessed right. Philip was alone—sitting in the usual disorder, with his elbows on the table, his hands on his head, absorbed in a book.

"Philip!" Nan half-whispered. The boy started, looked at Nan in a bewildered way, and then jumped to his feet.

"Nan!" he exclaimed, "come in. I *am* glad you came. Ain't you going away, after all, with your fine relations?"

"Oh, yes!" Nan answered, just a little dolefully. "I'm

going—to-morrow; and I came—I ran away, Phil, to say good-bye to you. I guessed you'd be alone."

"You're a trump, Nan," said the boy, delightedly. "Oh, ain't you going to write to me about everything?"

Nan looked pained; but Philip did not see her expression, for he had begun to rummage among his shells.

"See here, Nan," he said, turning around before she answered; "here's the old pink shell we used to make a boat of. There, you can have it all for yourself now—a remembrance, don't you see?"

Nan's bright eyes were full of tears. She took the shell, and nodded softly.

"Thank you, Philip dear. I'm afraid I mustn't stay—I must say good-bye now, or they'll come after me. Thank you so much, Phil; and remember, *whatever* happens, I never, never, never could forget you. And I'll always love you."

And honest-hearted little Nan squeezed Phil around the neck convulsively, and before another word was said had fled away.

Going up the street, she rejoiced that she had so successfully accomplished her errand; yet another idea had come to her mind. Probably no one at "The Willows" would be any the wiser for her little flight; but would it not be what Lance would have called "squarer" to go herself and

tell Phyllis? Nan's nature, impulsive and full of faults though it might be, was honest and true in every fibre, and it did not take her long to come to a decision as to what was right. She made her way noiselessly in at the side entrance without being discovered, but once in the upper hall she went boldly to her cousin's door. Phyllis had not stirred from the easy-chair in which Nan had left her. The light from the lamp on a table near her showed Nan a very different room from the shabby parlor in which she had just said good-bye to Philip; and, as the little girl went in, she had a queer sort of feeling that she had said good-bye to shabbiness and dirt and disorder forever; but something else was struggling within her, as she looked at Phyllis's fair, beautiful, cold face. "I haven't said good-bye to my *conscience*, any way," she was thinking; and with a brave resolve she walked up to her cousin's side.

"Cousin Phyllis," she said in a low tone, "I've been down to Aunt Rupert's and seen Philip, and said good-bye to him. I knew you wouldn't like it—but I'm not—sorry I did it." And here Nan's voice broke, and she burst into tears.

For an instant Phyllis felt very angry. Then, before she spoke, the honesty of the child touched her. It touched her, but not as the same thing would have touched my little Nan. The brilliant young lady had to admire the child's



““WHATEVER HAPPENS, I NEVER, NEVER COULD FORGET YOU.””

fearlessness, yet she also thought quickly how receiving her confession kindly might be a "good thing" in the future—might strengthen her influence over the possible heiress of all Miss Rolf's fortune.

"Very well, Nan," she said, kissing the little bowed head; "we will agree to forget it. Now go away and get ready for prayers. Mrs. Grange will soon be home."

And Nan, feeling a great load off her little heart, went into her own room and put away her shell in the big trunk already full of her new possessions.

She was grateful to Phyllis, and, best of all, relieved of what would certainly have been a burden to her conscience; and when the prayers and lesson of the day were read, my little heroine felt that her last night in Bromfield was a happy one, after all.

CHAPTER IX.

EVERYTHING in Mrs. Grange's large, fine house, the sudden change in her circumstances, the new clothes, and new prospects had kept Nan very much subdued before they started on their wonderful journey; but by the time they were fairly on the train and nearing Beverley, Miss Phyllis Rolf found she had her hands full in keeping pace with her little charge. To begin with, Nan's old "flibberty-gibberty" ways, as Mrs. Rupert used to call them, had reasserted themselves. She had to have her hat and her collar and her tie rearranged half a dozen times, and even her face washed and her hair brushed twice; and then she asked Phyllis a dozen questions at a time. Finally Phyllis said rather peremptorily, "Nan, if you will sit perfectly still for ten minutes—we shall soon be in Beverley—I'll answer some of your questions."

They had chairs in the parlor-car, and Nan wheeled hers around with a very bright expression. She wanted to know something more definite of her Aunt Letitia and the house at Beverley. It seemed too bad that it had begun to rain,

and that it would be nearly dark when they got there; but then *everything* couldn't go on being just perfectly delightful.

"It is a large brick house," said Phyllis. "There is a short drive up to the front-door, but a nice lawn and gardens at the side; and, by the way, your aunt will be very particular about your going into the garden without her permission. She never allows any one to pick flowers by themselves."

"Is she *very* cross?" said Nan.

Phyllis laughed.

"Oh no!" she answered. "But, Nan—I had better tell you—she is rather peculiar in some ways. She never likes any one to contradict her or to have opinions of their own. You must always seem to think just as she does."

"But suppose I *don't*," said honest Nan, opening her eyes to a perfect stare.

Phyllis had a very pretty white forehead—so smooth that every little line showed in it; and, though it was a very small frown, Nan saw one distinctly between her eyebrows.

"Then you must *try* and think so," she answered. "Now I'll tell you more about the house. There are a great many windows, some looking on the gardens, some towards the street. The street just there is rather hilly; indeed, 'Rolf House,' as it is always called, is near the top of the street.

You go in by a wide door, and there is a square hall, with a staircase going up at the left side. There is a big fireplace in the hall; on one side is a room called the black-walnut parlor, on the other a long drawing-room; and the library is on one side, and the dining-room on the other. Everything is very handsome."

"So I'll have to be careful of the things," said Nan, who was perfectly quiet, listening.

Phyllis laughed.

"You won't have to think much of that, I imagine," she answered. "You are to be very well looked after, I can assure you, Nan!"

Nan waited a minute, and then said:

"Kept very strict, do you mean, Cousin Phyllis?"

"*Very*," said Phyllis.

"Well, where do you live?" asked Nan, after puckering her face up into a dozen wrinkles over this new idea.

"We live in College Street," said Phyllis, "about half a mile from 'Rolf House.' Ours is a rather shabby house, though it's large. Did I tell you about my sisters and brothers?"

Nan's face lighted up instantly with one of those sweet unselfish or unconscious looks which made her positively pretty.

"No!" she said—"but *do*—please do, Cousin Phyllis."

“Well, there are six of them—Lance and Laura, and the twins Joan and Dick, and the younger boys, Alfred and Bertie.”

“All my cousins?” said Nan, feeling as if the world was getting to be a very big place.

“Every one,” laughed Phyllis.

And now in the pale wintry dusk they began to see the lights of the town, and Nan’s heart beat very quickly when the train stopped, and she found herself following Phyllis out upon the covered platform, where she saw a servant in livery come up respectfully, and stand by while her cousin gave him directions about the trunks.

Nan’s education had been of the most fragmentary kind; but it so happened that she had read two or three novels, or stories, in which heroines had arrived at a railway station, to be met by fine servants in livery, and driven to fine houses, where they were received in great state. Now, as she stood, a little half-frightened figure clinging to Phyllis’s side, it flashed across her mind that she was just such a heroine, and it gave her a great deal of sudden courage. She thought of the big brick house with all its splendors, and how in a short time she would make a sort of state entry there—would there be a row of servants in the hall, she wondered? Well, something very especial to welcome her—Nan felt she could be sure of that.

And then Phyllis said, "Come, Nan ;" and they went out of the noisy station in the dusk, and up a flight of steps, where, just as Nan expected, a very grand carriage was waiting. In a moment more they were whirling away, through a pretty, hilly town, where the shop-windows were just being lighted, and where there was a long bridge over a river, and a line of hills in the distance. Nan felt sure she was *really* like one of her dearest heroines, and only regretted her name was so short and unromantic.

"I shall try and imagine I am called Florizel," she thought, "or Alexandrina." And before she had come to any decision about the two names, the carriage rolled in a gateway, beyond which Nan could see the large brick house, with its many windows irregularly lighted.

CHAPTER X.

NAN quite forgot she was Florizel in the bewilderment of the next few moments. The door was opened widely—a stream of light poured out up the gravel path, and in the glow she saw a stately old lady standing with an elderly man-servant at her side. Then in a confused way she heard the lady say, “How do you do, Annice?” and she felt herself being kissed, while as if in a dream she found herself following the old lady and Phyllis down the hall and into a square, primly furnished parlor. Here Nan’s heart began to beat a little less wildly, and she took courage to look about her. First, of course, at Miss Rolf, who stood talking to Phyllis in an undertone about the journey, and something about Nan herself. Stately and severe she no doubt looked, yet Nan felt drawn towards her aunt in a curious way she could not explain. Her face must once have looked like Phyllis’s, Nan thought: there was the same finely chiselled outline of feature, the straight nose and the well-defined eyebrows; but Miss Rolf, for all her years, had something in her face which Nan liked better than

anything about pretty, blooming Cousin Phyllis. Sitting over by the tall, old-fashioned chimney-piece, little Nan took note of the old lady's exquisite silver-gray silk dress, the white lace kerchief and cap, the beautiful white hands, and the flash of opals in a brooch at her throat. Where had the child ever seen anything so queenly and beautiful? Miss Rolf did not guess what was going on in the mind of her little niece that first ten minutes. Inwardly Nan had decided she was quite willing to submit to her aunt's rule, and that she should like to be with her. The room was undoubtedly the black-walnut parlor of which Phyllis had spoken; it was furnished in dark colors, but everything was refined and old-fashioned and comfortable. There were candles lighted in tall silver candlesticks on the chimney-piece and on a side-table, and a wood fire glowed on the hearth. Presently the door opened, and the man-servant Nan had seen came in with a large tray, which he set down on a table in the centre of the room, and then Miss Rolf broke off her conversation with Phyllis and turned to little Nan.

"I presume you feel hungry, my dear," she said kindly; "and you too, Phyllis. I thought you would like something to eat in here."

Phyllis had thrown herself down in a large easy-chair near the fire. "How good of you, Cousin Letty!" she said,



PHYLLIS TELLS MISS ROLF ABOUT THE JOURNEY.



with a long-drawn sigh. "Everything always looks so homelike and tempting here."

Miss Rolf only smiled in a quiet way, and watched the servant critically while he set out the dainty little supper, to which she invited the travellers, pouring out their tea, and urging the biscuits and oysters and other things upon Nan, who, hungry as she was, felt almost too shy to eat.

"And now I must go," Phyllis said, after she had finished her supper. "Good-bye, little Nan; I'll see you in the morning."

"No, Phyllis dear," said Miss Rolf, quietly, "it will be as well not to come to see the child to-morrow. I think she will be better quiet."

Nan said nothing; but as Cousin Phyllis kissed her good-bye, she clung to her fervently—a wild longing to run away back to Bromfield, even to the butter-shop, coming over her; but in a moment the door had closed upon Phyllis's figure. She was alone with her aunt, and a feeling came over her, for the first time, that a new life really had begun.

"You had better eat something more," Miss Rolf was saying. "No? Well then, perhaps, my dear, you would like to go to bed. I will not keep you up for prayers to-night. Generally I read them at half-past eight."

Miss Rolf touched a bell, and when it was answered she

said, "Please send Mrs. Heriot here," and in a moment a pleasant-faced, elderly woman appeared who looked at Nan in a very kindly critical way.

"This is Miss Annice Rolf, Mrs. Heriot," said the old lady. "Will you take her up to her room, and—you need not stay with her after she is in bed. Good-night, my child."

Nan kissed Miss Rolf very timidly, and went away with Mrs. Heriot, who held her little hand in a firm grasp that was very comforting.

They passed down the matted hall and up a staircase to the left. Above, a narrow corridor led to three little steps which dipped down into Nan's room. It was small and comfortable—not very bright, perhaps, for all the furniture was old-fashioned and sombre; but there was a window with a deep seat in it, and some interesting-looking pictures on the walls. The bed-curtains were of chintz, the pattern of which was a series of pictures, and the wall-paper repeated a design of a garden and a terrace, along which a lady and gentleman were walking. Altogether Nan thought, as Mrs. Heriot lighted the candles, that she should like her new room and enjoy the walls and the window.

She wished Mrs. Heriot would talk a little more while she helped her to undress, but, except for asking her one or two things about the journey, she made no remarks.

When she had tucked Nan into bed, she just nodded at her and smiled, and, taking the candle in her hand, walked away, her footsteps sounding softly until she was down-stairs.

Nan lay still, half-afraid, but on the whole comfortable. She had so much to think and wonder about! To-morrow would certainly be a wonderful day; but why should her aunt object to Phyllis's coming back? Nan's little brain soon got all sorts of things in a tangle, and she fell asleep to dream that she was in Bromfield selling butter to Mrs. Heriot.

CHAPTER XI.

"**MAY 16**,—isn't it, Mrs. Heriot?"

Nan was standing in the window of the black-walnut parlor, looking out upon the wet lawn and gardens, while Mrs. Heriot was engaged in putting away some fine china in one of the cupboards.

"May 16, in all its particulars, sure enough," rejoined Mrs. Heriot. "You're here just two weeks to-day."

Nan gave a little sigh.

"Well, it seems longer," she said, turning around. "Mrs. Heriot, when will my cousins be here, do you think?"

"Oh, in half an hour, I should say."

"Will they mind the wet?"

Mrs. Heriot laughed.

"Not they—I wished they did; for they're only too likely to come tramping up my floors with their muddy boots."

"But aren't they afraid of Aunt Letitia?" exclaimed Nan, inwardly delighted by the idea of cousins who were fearless.

"Not one bit—now," said Mrs. Heriot, turning around to

examine a delicate bit of porcelain more carefully in the light. "You'll have to keep them out of mischief the whole time. If Lance were home he would see to them—though he's no quiet lamb himself—but Dicksie and Joan are enough to bring the house about one's ears if they were let."

"Are they the twins?"

Mrs. Heriot nodded.

Nan returned to her window, eagerly watching the bit of the street which just below the lawn she could see quite plainly.

As Mrs. Heriot had said, she had been two weeks at Rolf House, and in that time she had learned so much of its ways that she felt as if her stay had been much longer. The household was a very quiet, orderly one, and if Miss Rolf felt that Nan's being in it made a decided difference, at least she never showed it, for, so far as Nan could see, nothing had been changed on her account. True, she had lessons every morning from a young lady, in whom Nan could not feel much interested, she was so prim and quiet, and apparently so very learned, and Miss Rolf examined her every evening. Between whiles, she spent much of her time with Mrs. Heriot, who was a sort of housekeeper and general factotum, learning to sew and to do worsted-work; and regularly every afternoon she went for a walk or a drive

with her aunt. These occasions were Nan's only periods of real enjoyment, for they usually went into the town either to shop or visit some poor person, and once or twice Cousin Phyllis had been with them. At seven o'clock Nan took tea with Miss Rolf, after which they would sit an hour or so in the drawing-room or black-walnut parlor, where sometimes Nan read aloud to her aunt, and sometimes her aunt talked over the lessons Miss Prior had given her for the next day. Miss Rolf was always kind in her manner, but very, very cold and reserved, yet to Nan there was something very wonderful about the beautifully dressed, stately figure of her aunt. She longed sometimes to draw nearer to her. When she received the chilly good-night kiss which dismissed her for bed, she had often been tempted to fling her arms about her aunt's neck and hug her wildly; but she was always glad afterwards to have restrained such an impulse, for what *would* Miss Rolf have thought of her? Impetuous little Nan shuddered sometimes to think!

But now a diversion was expected. Her cousins from College Street had all been invited to spend the afternoon and take tea, and Nan had been dressed and waiting for half an hour. Miss Rolf was out for the day, but Mrs. Heriot had received full instructions as to what they could and could not do, and the old lady would be home for the usual seven-o'clock tea, they might be certain.

"There!" cried Nan, darting a look around at Mrs. Heriot—"there they are!"

"Dear, dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Heriot, coming forward with a cup and the duster in her hand. "Yes; sure enough—there they are, sure."

What Nan, pressing her face eagerly against the window-pane, beheld was a curious, rollicking procession of young people coming up the hilly street. Evidently the twins first—a tall, lank young girl, with black hair and dark eyes, and a boy nearly her counterpart in size and coloring—were amusing themselves by jumping over all the puddles, while behind walked or ran two younger boys and a girl of fourteen, everything being on the hop, skip, and jump with one and all; but could the tall, graceful figure in the waterproof be Cousin Phyllis? Nan could scarcely believe the evidence of her own eyes: yet it was certainly she—there could be no doubt of this; but why should she, of all people, allow such pranks?

I must say that the pranks delighted Nan. She grinned broadly from within her window, and the tribe of cousins saw her and executed various little antics before they reached the door, in merry response. Only the girl of about fourteen, walking near to Phyllis, offered her no such salute. Nan decided that she looked haughty, and perhaps disagreeable.

By the time they had reached the door, some degree of quiet seemed to have reached them, though as they poured into the hall they were all panting from the variety of exercises in which they had been indulging.

"Dear me, Miss Phyllis!" said Mrs. Heriot, who had hurried out into the hall, "you must be quite wet. Do let me have your things."

Phyllis submitted gracefully to having them taken from her.

"And the children—perhaps," faltered Mrs. Heriot, "I might take them right out into the kitchen to dry a moment."

The tribe showed signs of joy at this suggestion; but they also looked eagerly at the new cousin standing half-shyly in the parlor-door.

And then that involuntary look and air of sweet unconsciousness came over little Nan.

"Oh, may I come too?" she said; and before any one could say how it was done she was in the midst of the cousins, who were looking at her and talking to her all in a quick, excited way—all except Laura, who had drawn back close to where Phyllis sat on one of the hall chairs.

Nan looked up shyly towards her. She was very pretty—fairer and daintier than Cousin Phyllis, but how different from the latter's smiling glance was her frown,

and the half-pout which spoiled the curve of her pretty mouth!

“Oh, do come!” cried Joan, the tallest of the twins. “Oh, Mrs. Heriot—Phyllis—can’t we go at once?”

It seemed as if neither of the two appealed to had any idea of resistance. Phyllis, divested of her wet garments, sauntered towards the parlor, closely followed by Laura, while the rest trooped after Mrs. Heriot to the kitchen.

The kitchen at Rolf House was down-stairs, and was a place which had already fascinated Nan—it was so large and bright and homelike. Susan, the cook, though a trifle cross, was a very interesting person, capable of telling long stories, and supplying young people with good things out of tin boxes in her corner cupboards. There were high windows in this kitchen, and to the left were the pantry and dairy-room. Susan had under her a young girl named Martha, with whom Nan longed secretly to make friends. When the cousins trooped down into the kitchen, Martha was kneading bread, and Susan was preparing some cheese.

In a few moments they were all sitting about the fire, in spite of Susan’s exclamations and Mrs. Heriot’s air of dread as to what might happen, and very soon a liberal supply of doughnuts and cookies was dispensed. Then Joan exclaimed, “Mrs. Heriot—please—we want to go to the attic. May we?”

1 Mrs. Heriot began to look dubious, and Nan said, "What's in the attic?"

"Oh," said Dick eagerly, "it's the jolliest old place to play in! You'll like it ever so much. Mayn't we?"

"If you'll behave yourselves," said Mrs. Heriot, as gravely as possible. "Now mind, Dicksie boy; no tantarantums."

Whatever they were, Dicksie readily agreed to give way to none; and, as soon as their wet feet were dry, the young Rolfs from College Street were on their way to a part of the house Nan had never seen.

Meanwhile Joan had tight hold of Nan's brown little hand: she had already whispered to her, "Nan, I *love* you;" and Nan had responded by a fervent hug, which, although it nearly stifled Joan, had seemed to produce a complete understanding between them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE attic at Rolf House was a large, irregular place, lighted by queer little windows, and which extended over the entire house. There were some bins in it, the bottoms partially covered with nuts, and several old trunks, some broken pieces of furniture, and a locked chest of drawers. A swing had been hung from one of the beams, and Bertie and Alfred, the younger boys, had left their carpentering tools in one of the many irregular corners.

"Did you *never* come up here?" asked Joan of Nan, as they arrived at the last step of the attic stairs. Joan had a thin little face, and a queer way of puckering up her lips after she said anything. She looked, as Nan expressed it to herself, "ready for *anything*."

"No," said Nan. "You see, I've just gone wherever I was told to."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dick, in tones either of dismay or disappointment. "Are you *that* kind of a girl?"

"What do you mean?" said Nan, trying to laugh. "See

here, won't you tell me all your names and ages, and everything?"

Joan's eyes twinkled. "Oh, wait, Nan!" she said. "It'll be such fun if you *don't* know. Now *please*—we'll make a game of it: see here." For a moment the boys seemed rebellious, but Joan quelled them by a look. "See, Nan, you sit down there."

Nan, quite willing to be amused, especially by Joan, sat down in an old arm-chair, while her spirited cousin had in a moment whisked all the others into the bins. She then went over to one side of the attic, where there was a tall, rather tattered screen, which she dragged across, placing it at an appropriate distance between Nan and the young people who were skirmishing around in the bins. Over this she hung some newspapers, saying, meanwhile, "We've often played at theatricals this way."

"Is it to be theatricals?" inquired Nan from her place as audience.

"Not *quite*," responded Joan, shaking her elf-locks. "Because, you see, it will be all *true*."

She then retired behind the screen, and held various half-audible conversations with the children in the bins. Nan could hear Alfred complaining that the nuts hurt his knees, and Dick inquiring if he could say some poetry when he came out; but Joan evidently governed them all satisfac-

torily, for in a short time there was silence. Then came the sound of a singular kind of music. It seemed to be produced by Joan "murmuring" through closed teeth, and as it had no particular tune, or idea of any, it was, in an attic, rather melancholy; but at last there emerged from behind the screen a figure wrapped in an old red curtain Nan had seen in a corner, and Joan's voice said, "Ricardo Rolfó—appear!" And, with some scrambling, Dicksie came out, standing very still.

"This boy," said Joan, in a sepulchral tone, "is Mr. Walter Rolf's second son. He is nearly thirteen. He attends the High-school, and has taken three prizes. He has the honor of being Joan Rolf's twin brother, although, alas! he causes her more pain than joy. He will recite."

Whereupon Dicksie began, in a tragic tone:

"And this to me he said:

And t'were not for thy hoary beard,
The hand of Richard had not spared
To cleave the Joan's head."

He made a dab towards Joan as he said this, and Nan interposed:

"Oh, I know that! It's out of Marmion; but it *really* says, 'The hand of Marmion had not spared to cleave the Douglas' head.'"

“Oh well, I *know*, Nan,” said Joan’s voice from inside her wrappings. “But you needn’t be so particular; we say lots of pieces like that and put our own names in. Now,” she added, in an altered voice, “Ricardo, retire. Next!” And Alfred’s curly little head appeared.

“This,” said Joan, “is Alfred, so-called the great, as his appetite never fails. He is nearly eleven. He is most proficient in standing upon his head. Alfred—heads!”

Whereupon Alfred’s head suddenly took the place of his heels, the latter dangling an instant in the air before Joan suddenly slapped them downwards, and he retired very purple and rather irritated.

“Next!” Joan exclaimed. And Bertie, much the worse for nuts, appeared. Bertie had Phyllis’s soft eyes and gentle look, with Joan’s dark hair. Nan instinctively felt, “He’s a darling,” and all the time Joan spoke he kept trying to hide a dear little dimpling smile.

“This young person,” said Joan, in a most terrible voice, “fears neither parent nor sister. He is aged in years seven. Yet he is old in iniquities, such as running away, tearing his clothes, losing his school-books, and forgetting his lessons. However, people try to love him,” and here Joan, in spite of her wraps and her character of oracle, made a sort of jump towards him which ended in a squeeze—“and he does know how to sing. Sing!”



"BERTIE, MUCH THE WORSE FOR NUTS, APPEARED."

Upon this Bertie began and sang quite through a pretty little childish song, in a voice like that of a thrush. Nan thought she could cry over it; but Joan quickly hustled him away, and, throwing off her disguise, said in a very ordinary although fatigued voice:

"Wasn't that fun, Nan! Now I think you ought to talk about yourself."

Nan crimsoned, remembering Phyllis's words of warning, yet in the child's heart a sense of honesty arose which predominated over everything else. She said, trying to laugh:

"It was *real* fun; how well you did it, Joan! Well, I'll tell you. You know I am the daughter of Aunt Letty's nephew, but I've been living for some time with very poor, common kind of people, you would say—with my Step-aunt and Uncle Rupert. They keep a butter-and-cheese shop in Bromfield, Connecticut."

A dismayed group clustered for a moment about her.

"But you are *our* cousin," exclaimed Joan.

"*Of course*," said Nan, holding her head up very high; "and you are no relation of the Ruperts at all."

There was silence for an instant. Then Joan said, puckering up her nose scornfully, "Oh well, where's the difference? Don't let's bother about it, anyhow." And with her usual energy she proceeded to think of another game.

"If Laura only *chose* to do it," she said, looking around

the big, fast-darkening attic, "she could tell us a lovely story."

"Oh, *do* get her to do it," cried Nan. "Shall I go for her?"

Joan thought a moment, and then said "*Yes*," very impressively.

Nan, under the influence of young companionship, had lost all sense of timidity in the large, silent house. She darted down the attic-stairs quickly, and along the upper corridors and down to the parlor where Laura and Phyllis were seated.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN the children went up-stairs, Laura Rolf followed her elder sister into the parlor almost crying. To her way of thinking, Nan was a real little intruder. It was *she* who hitherto had been old Miss Rolf's favorite, *she* who had been treated with most deference when she came to the house; and the idea of this queer, vulgar girl's coming in to usurp her place was unbearable.

The parlor looked rather gloomy on this rainy May afternoon. Even cheerful Phyllis felt it. While Laura sat sulkily in the window, she drew near to the little smouldering fire and tried to divert her mind by reading. It would have been a great comfort to Phyllis had she known just *how* to help and govern her younger brothers and sisters, but unfortunately her life had been led with no standards for human conduct. Her father was a happy, idle man, who cared only for his own pleasure and comfort, and Phyllis had grown up with no one to say to her, "Do this because it is *right*. Do *not* do this because it is *wrong*."

She was beautiful and clever and gentle-hearted, but she

had never once learned that lesson of bearing and forbearing, nor had she seen how necessary to all happiness is the living according to God's golden rule. Her sisters and brothers had been left wholly to her guidance. This was well enough, so far as she thought, while the children were very young; but now they were growing older, beginning to develop instincts and ideas and have purposes of their own. Phyllis would not have admitted it to herself, but sometimes she felt dismayed, having no rock of guidance—no place to go and seek the help she needed.

While Laura sulked in the window, beating her heels against the wainscot and trying to pout as visibly as possible, Phyllis sat down by the fire with a book in her hand, which she could not read. Then Laura began:

"I *do* think, Phyllis, this is disgraceful. The idea of Cousin Letty's having to hunt about for some one to be her heiress. I *do* think it's *too* mean."

Laura paused. Phyllis turned her finely cut, sweet face around towards the window, where the rain beat, and where her little sister was sitting, the picture of wrath and ill-temper.

"And I'm *sure* we'll all be ashamed of her," Laura went on. "How can we help it? Right out of such a set."

"Laura!" said Phyllis, suddenly standing up. "There was no *set*, as you call it, about it. This child is your cousin

quite as much as she is the niece of those Ruperts, and I think it wicked of you to feel like that—I—”

And then the door opened upon Nan herself. She had come down breathless from the attic, and just the sight of Cousin Phyllis's face seemed to cheer her as she came into the room. Laura turned away, resolutely pressing her face against the window-pane. She was determined that, at all events, this interloper should not make friends with *her*.

Nan stood still a moment in the doorway. She had on the brown dress Phyllis had bought her, and with dainty lace frills in her neck and sleeves, and with that sweet, kindly look upon her face, she looked anything but the vulgar interloper which Laura had considered her.

“I've come for—Cousin Laura,” she said, timidly. “Joan says you could tell us such a lovely story if you would. Will you please, Laura?”

Phyllis said nothing. Laura turned a very contemptuous gaze around upon her unwelcome cousin, but the darkening color at her back quite hid her face. Nan saw only the pretty, waving blonde hair, the outline of cheek and chin so like Phyllis's.

“Will you?” she repeated.

“Yes,” said Laura. She got up, still very sullenly, and walked towards the door. Phyllis knew she was in a bad temper.

"Laura!" she called out, but the door closed, and whether she heard or not, Laura walked on entirely unmindful of the voice.

"They are in the attic," said Nan, on the staircase.

"All right," rejoined Laura. It was all that she would say until the attic was reached. The children greeted her tumultuously, but by this time Nan had begun to feel very uncomfortable; for it was clearly evident that her cousin Laura was quite unlike Phyllis or Joan. Nan felt she might admire her, but could she ever *love* her? And Nan, who never before had known the association of cousins whom she felt were well-bred and refined, longed to make herself at once one with these girls.

When they reached the top of the stairs Laura drew back a moment, but Joan sprang forward, exclaiming,

"Lollie! Lollie! do come and tell us a nice story!"

Laura frowned. She hung back against the railing of the staircase for a moment before she decided to join the group above.

Joan evidently valued Laura's capacity for telling stories. She placed an easy-chair and commanded the children to silence, while she motioned Nan imperiously to the next best seat, she herself coddling against Laura's knee. All this seemed to mollify Laura, who looked out upon the little rain-washed garden below the window, and then said:

* I'll tell a new story I've just made up."

"Um—um—um," murmured Joan, convulsively clutching Laura's knee. "You see," she added, looking up at Nan, "Laura is perfectly *wonderful* about stories."

"Well," began Laura, "there was once a princess"—she paused now and then to think it over—"who didn't know exactly where she was from ; that is, she knew she was a *princess* and had a right to a crown, yet she couldn't tell *how* it was. One day an old fairy appeared to her and said, 'Come home with me ; I am your guardian genie, and I have care of your fortunes.' And so she took her to a wonderful palace all loaded with precious stones and where the princess had everything. She had all she liked, or imagined she could care for. And so she lived on and on, and the fairy loved her and treated her like her own child. Well, one day she went out for a walk in the by-ways—"

"What are the by-ways?" interrupted Alfred.

"By-ways are streets belonging to princesses," said Joan, giving Alfred's foot a push with her own. "Don't interrupt."

"Well, *you* interrupt, miss," grumbled Alfred.

Laura went on : "When the princess returned from her walk she found the whole palace changed : the servants and everybody refused to let her in. They said she was a mere *nothing*," and here Laura curled her lips as disdainfully as

possible; "that the fairy had now a new favorite. This made the princess cry very hard, but she sat down outside the gates, and as every one would come out she asked something about the fairy's new favorite, and she was *delighted* to hear she was very unhappy. So time went on, and—"

Here Laura's story suddenly came to a close, for Miss Rolf's voice was heard below; and Alfred the Great sprang up, exclaiming:

"Tea—ee—ee—tea. I know!"

Laura rose with a very grand air, and Joan said,

"I didn't feel much interested in that story, any way."

"Well," said Laura, sharply, "it would have been very interesting, and," she added, with a glance at Nan, "it was about *true people*."

Nan stood up with the others, and, catching Laura's meaning glance, she wondered just what it was intended for. Perhaps, she thought, Laura would explain it later.

Romp as they would, the cousins knew that Miss Rolf expected them to look neat and clean when they came to the table. So they all trooped down to Nan's room, where Laura looked at everything very critically, while the younger ones washed their hands. Nan came up near to Laura once or twice and tried to make friends pleasantly, but it was generosity wasted. Laura's mind was evidently warped by her jealousy, and little Nan turned for comfort to Joan,

who was ready enough with love and friendship, or cousinship, to any extent.

"Nan," Joan whispered, "we'll have to go down and see Cousin Letty first before tea, and we must walk as straight—as straight!"

Joan's face puckered comically as she said this, and Nan answered by a tight hug. The two walked down the stairs arm in arm, and so entered the long, old-fashioned drawing-room where Miss Rolf and Phyllis were seated.

Nan's little face was beaming; and in spite of her coldness old Miss Rolf looked at the child with a pleased air. She liked the smile and the gladness about Nan's mouth and eyes. She put her hand out, drew Nan towards her, and kissed her more tenderly than ever before. Then she turned to Laura, saying,

"Well, dear, how are you to-day? Haven't you a word for your old cousin?"

Nan had never heard Miss Rolf's voice so gentle, nor had she ever seen her look just as she did at Laura. It was very evident that Laura was her favorite.

"Oh," said Laura, laughing, "I've plenty to say, Cousin Letty; but I don't suppose I'm any consequence now!"

She knelt down by the old lady, who smoothed her fair hair softly, while Nan and the others walked over to the big, low window which overlooked one portion of the gar-

dens. An animated though whispered conversation went on. Joan had decided that she would tell Nan what she called *the* secret, and Alfred tried to rebel against it.

Meanwhile Nan sat curled up in one end of the window, trying to suppress her desire to laugh, and Joan, kneeling down in front of her and pressing her elbows into Nan's knees, held her thin little face in her hands and looked unutterable things at Alfred.

Phyllis glanced from the two figures by the hearth—the old lady and pretty, ill-tempered Laura—to the group in the window, of which Nan was the centre. Something about that child stirred within the worldly girl's heart a feeling of respect which was not unlike fear. She felt that if only she were a few years older, Nan could be her very dearest friend. And, after all, between twelve and twenty the years are not so many. Nan possessed what Phyllis knew not of. With all her giddiness, her love of fun, her wild, perhaps disorderly, ways, she had the secret of openness and truth, of that "fearlessness in grace" which only God can give.

"I *will* tell," said Joan, in a determined whisper. "Nan, see here: we belong to a society; it's us all and some of our friends, and early in June you can be inshated."

"In-itiated," corrected Alfred.

"Well, whatever you call it," said Joan, with a toss of her head; "and then it will be *great* fun!"



“AN ANIMATED THOUGH WHISPERED CONVERSATION WENT ON.”

Nan's eyes danced. "Oh, won't it!" she exclaimed. "Is it hard to be in—initiated?"

Joan smiled in a superior manner. "Oh"—she looked at Alfred—"I should say it was! But, Nan," she added, quietly, "we won't make it *very* frightening. At least it has to be *some* frightening, but we'll do our best."

The tea-bell interrupted Nan in the answer she was about to make, but all during the meal she thought of the horrors and also of the glory before her. But when would she be allowed to go to College Street? She determined as soon as possible to ask her aunt whether she might not return her cousins' visit. Somehow Nan began no longer to fear the old lady's kiss. She had seen the look on Miss Rolf's face when she entered the drawing-room, and it comforted her very heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THERE!" exclaimed Nan, shutting her exercise-book with a bang. "There, Miss Prior, it is finished!"

"I should say it was," Miss Prior answered, very calmly. "Look how you have blotted it."

Nan's countenance fell. Her one idea had been haste, and it was quite true that the exercise, though all written, was blotted heavily.

"What shall I do?" she said, grumblingly.

"Write it over again," rejoined the governess, in her iciest tones.

"Oh, Miss Prior, I can't! I shall be too late."

"You know my rule, Annice," was the answer. "I can never hope to correct you of your giddy, disorderly ways if I once overlook anything. Come: 'La Cigale ayant chanté.'" And Miss Prior, without relaxing a muscle of her face, began to dictate the exercise which Nan had just written.

The room in which Nan and her governess were seated was one which had, half a century before, been Miss Rolf's own school-room. It had been unused so long that every-

thing looked faded and more old-fashioned even than other parts of the large house. The first time Nan entered it she thought what a lovely place it would be to romp in, for it was so large, and the furniture so scant; but, under Miss Prior's rule, romping anywhere, Nan discovered, would be considered most unpardonable. A faded Turkey carpet of indefinite reds was on the floor; some old-fashioned maps and charts hung on the walls between the four windows—one at each end, two at the side; there were globes and one or two desks; a piano of more recent date than the rest of the furniture—though rather a “tin pan” at best, Nan thought—was between two of the windows, and at one side an elaborate chemical apparatus, which Nan longed to have some day entirely to herself. Nan's desk was in the middle of the room—Miss Prior objected to her being near the windows—and the governess always occupied a stiff chair near a little table to her right. Now, with all Nan's lack of education, and the vulgarity of her recent surroundings, she dearly loved to see pretty objects about her, to have bright, soft colors in view—something to please her eye as well as her heart. And the dreary school-room oppressed her even in this soft May weather; but Miss Prior oppressed her still more. “That lady,” Joan Rolf remarked, “would freeze a canary with a look;” and Nan, for all her high spirits, felt the process of chilling go on very success-

fully when she was with her governess. Yet Miss Prior never for an instant suspected that she was not the very wisest and kindest and most comprehensive of Nan's new friends. In person she was rather small, with thin blonde hair, which she wore gathered into the smallest possible knot at the back of her head, light blue eyes, perfectly regular, cold features, the lips as thin as they could be and ever open, the chin decidedly square. Unfortunately for herself, Miss Prior was one of those persons who consider themselves as injured by having to work for her living, and it seemed to her as though she ought always to enforce upon others a sense of her "dignity." Whenever she did unbend with Nan it was to tell of the comforts and elegancies of her life before "poor papa" died, and she never discovered that Nan was by no means impressed either by a sense of her former glory, or any feeling that she was not doing the part of a perfect lady in being a governess. Miss Rolf had engaged her on the strength of the warm recommendations of Western friends, and also because she was really highly educated, so far as book-learning went; but little Nan needed a warmer, finer kind of association. Just then her governess should have been her dearest friend.

On this morning Nan's haste and her impatience were partially excusable, for she was to pay her first visit to the cousins in College Street at three o'clock; and Mrs. Heriot

would keep her "forever," thought Nan, doing her hair and looking over her dress, and it was already one, and in two minutes, Nan felt sure, the dinner-bell would ring—and, there! went another blot. Nan's little brown head bent lower and lower over her writing, while her feelings arose in rebellion. She crooked her elbows out more and more, and received a "fillip" of an exasperating kind from Miss Prior's thimble, and, at last, flurried and nervous, let a tear splash down and mingle with a very blackly written word in a little inky stream.

"Annice!" exclaimed Miss Prior. She stood up in perfect horror.

Nan leaned back in her chair, two more tears gathering under her dark lashes. She felt humble and ashamed, although it seemed as if she *could* not write one other word.

"You can go away now," said Miss Prior, very icily, "and get ready for dinner—but the work must remain *where it is*; and when you come to your lessons to-morrow, the exercise shall be written *twice* instead of once."

Nan's penitence vanished; for here she felt was injustice. How much more would a gentle word, even of rebuke, have done for her! But she was glad to escape. She went away to her room and dried her eyes, listening to the dinner-bell with a sense of relief.

But as she went down the long staircase, which was flood-

ed with May sunlight, a curious feeling of loneliness came over little Nan. She knew that everything money could buy was given her freely, that every one about her meant to be good and kind. But there was something wanting—a lack which made Nan's heart swell, and a sob rise involuntarily to her throat; what was it? And why, with all their common ways and vulgar ideas, had she not missed just this one thing in the Ruperts' household? She walked slowly across the hall, thinking how much she would give for one sight of her Cousin Philip's homely, gentle countenance, one hour with him on the beach or among his shells and poor little collection of curiosities. Yet it was only one month since she felt herself such a proud heroine of romance!

Miss Rolf was waiting for Nan at the head of the dinner-table. Seated behind the glittering silver and glass, dressed, as usual, faultlessly, with her rich old laces and dark silks, the old lady looked to Nan the very concentration of comfort and luxurious ease. Of course Nan did not define it in this way to herself; on the contrary, it made her only feel confused and sad, and long for something, she knew not what. She came into the room timidly, still very near to tears; and then she saw Miss Rolf look at her with a curious glance, half pity, half affection, altogether something gentler than Nan had ever seen.

The old lady put out one of her beautiful white hands, and Nan seemed to know what she meant. She came up very quietly, and laid her own little trembling fingers in it.

"Nan," Aunt Letty said, "you look sometimes so like your father!"

Nan's restraint soon gave way at this. It was certainly queer, in the middle of a bright sunshiny day, and just at dinner-time, for no apparent reason, to burst into tears—but that is precisely what Nan did. She flung her arms about the old lady's neck and sobbed passionately against the rich brown silk dress, while, what was more singular, Miss Rolf just let her cry away, holding her tenderly and kissing the rough mass of brown hair softly.

Robert, the butler, luckily did not come in on this scene, for I am afraid he would have thought his mistress had entirely lost her senses. To the servants as well as to Nan Miss Rolf was like a queen—proud, reserved, and certainly not a person before whom to betray any weakness; but the tenderness of the arms about Nan was unmistakable. When the little girl lifted up her flushed, tear-stained face, she seemed to feel as if everything danced in a glad light about her, and Miss Rolf had a delicate pink flush on her old cheeks. She looked almost as transformed and as excited as Nan.

"Dear, dear," she said, very quietly, "by-and-by you'll tell me all about it."

She held the little girl's hot head closely, and looked at her with something about her own eyelashes that glistened; for she was thinking of a day, thirty years ago, when Nan's father had been her idol. No child had ever wept in her arms, or looked as if they wanted to kiss her, since those days, and perhaps the perfectly natural outburst on Nan's part had made her feel what she had lost through pride and self-will.

"Nannie," the old lady said, earnestly, "I've a long story to tell you some day about your father. Some day I mean you to hear it. Now sit down, my child. There!" added Miss Rolf, quickly, her old stern look coming back—"there is Robert. Robert, you were a long time bringing in the soup. I must make Susan understand promptness better."

Nan glided into her seat, wondering if Robert noticed how red her eyes were. But that distinguished person did not betray it if he had. He moved about noiselessly as usual, and attended to Miss Rolf's slightest look with the greatest alacrity.



"MISS ROLF JUST LET HER CRY."



CHAPTER XV.

It had been arranged that Mrs. Heriot was to take Nan down to the Rolfs' in College Street, and my little heroine had to go through her usual worry of mind when that good woman had anything to do for her. Since not only did Mrs. Heriot never, by any chance, hurry—but it seemed to be one of her inflexible rules to be late on any such occasion.

Nan, in a pretty new gingham, with her new summer hat and a parasol, was waiting half an hour before Mrs. Heriot came slowly along the hall, looking very warm in a red shawl and a bonnet covered with flowers and feathers.

Nan could hardly walk down College Street any more composedly than the twins had on their visit. But it was not raining to-day; the sky was bright and blue, the air delicious, and in the gardens which they passed were all manner of spring blossoms; the lilacs seemed to nod their heads at Nan over the walls, and the syringas were, she thought, like big, white "day-time" stars.

Rolf House was at one end of a hilly street, and all along

going down towards the seaside part of the town, were fine, old-fashioned houses, with gardens and box-walks, and the look of old-time comfort which one sees in comfortable New England towns. Nan thought she would like to see inside some of the houses she passed, they looked so well kept and *contented*. Sometimes young faces appeared in the windows, and then Nan always said, "Mrs. Heriot, who lives there?" And Mrs. Heriot would cough significantly, look around, and give the names with bits of their family history. Some of the names impressed Nan very strongly, because of the young people in the windows. In one small, dreary-looking house, she saw the face of a little boy, evidently an invalid. He leaned against the window and pulled the tassel of the curtain with a thin, restless hand, while his sad eyes looked out upon the street, seeming to Nan to say how he longed to be there.

"That is Captain Hand's house," Mrs. Heriot explained, "and that boy is his grandson. He's had spine disease for years." Nan fancied the poor little fellow smiled at her as she looked up with a sweet, compassionate glance. She determined to ask Joan whether she knew him, and if they couldn't try to amuse him.

Below this long, irregular street lay the business part of the town and the shipping-places; but a river intersected the city and skirted along around back of College Street,

and Nan remembered, with a thrill of pleasure, that Joan had talked of a boat all their own ! Nan had a love of outdoor sports, which dominated, I fear, even her desire to be practical and well-educated. She had learned to row and to skate and to coast, and even to play ball, during her Bromfield life, and her secret desire at present was for a horse and a dog of her own. Mrs. Heriot took a short turning to the right, where the trees seemed to be closer and the street more countrified ; at its upper end were the colleges—large, red, brick buildings, with the shade of many elms. Nan had no interest in them, however ; she wanted to see Cousin Phyllis's home.

It was a large, though somewhat shabby, frame house, with a wing in which was a long, two-storied balcony. It stood back from the road, and had a wandering garden and lawn in front, and a porch with tall pillars, on which, as Nan and Mrs. Heriot appeared, the tribe of cousins were disporting themselves. Joan was busy on some fishing-lines, an operation which Dicksie was critically regarding, kneeling on the step below her ; Alfred and Bertie were marching up and down in a regimental manner ; and Laura was working just within the wide open door. The hall ran through the house, with wide doors at either end. Nan saw a big, straggling garden beyond, and had a glimpse of the river. Cousin Phyllis, in a fresh muslin dress and pretty blue ribbons, was standing on the back-steps.

The cousins greeted Nan tumultuously, except Laura, who, of course, was more dignified in her method of welcome. Mrs. Heriot went out to speak to Miss Phyllis, and Joan immediately laid hold of Nan.

"Now!" exclaimed Alfred, "what are we to do? what would you like to do, Nan?"

"Oh, *anything*," said beaming Nan.

Joan pondered; then she said, looking very earnestly at the rest, "Shall we show her the theatre first?"

"I suppose so," said Dick.

And, laying aside her gloves and parasol, Nan gladly allowed herself to be taken around the house and down towards the stables. There was here an old, unused carriage-house, and Joan, as they went, explained that their father had allowed them to make use of it for some theatricals they were getting up as a surprise for Phyllis's birthday. It was Joan who did the talking, but here Laura seemed to have been the manager, or organizer, of the enterprise, and she said, rather coldly, to Nan,

"Don't you want to take one of the parts, Nan?"

"Yes, please, if Aunt Letty says I may."

"Oh!" cried Joan, "can't she be the Captive, Laura?" And she added quickly, "You see Laura wrote the play all herself, and it's *perfectly beautiful*!"

Laura looked rather pleased by this, and she said perhaps



THE "THEATRE."

Nan *could* be the Captive. The carriage-house consisted of one large room, with a sort of framework of a partition at one side, which they intended to curtain, and at the back were two big windows, which with care might be used as exits. Indeed, the amusement to be derived from them seemed to appeal more than anything else to the boys, who immediately began tumbling in and out of them, Alfred's facility for putting his heels in the air coming in most usefully.

Laura showed Nan how they meant to divide the audience from the stage. It could readily be done—"but!" she sighed, "if only Lance were home, he would do it *all*."

And, singular to say, at this moment arose a shout from the twins, who were just outside the door:

"Lance! Lance! here he is!"

And there was a general scramble towards the house. Sure enough, it *was* Lance himself, though what had brought him home before vacation no one could imagine; but there he was striding across the garden, Joan and Dicksie clutching him violently, and Alfred performing his wildest antics near his heels.

Nan felt as if old Bromfield days had suddenly come back. She saw the store, the streets, Mrs. Grange's house, and the first glimpses of her new life. She drew back, almost wondering if Lance remembered her; but there was

no doubt in her mind a moment later, for Lance, with his bright smile and pleasant voice, had come up and grasped her hand affectionately.

"Well, how are you, little Nan?" he said, cheerily, and Nan laughed and dimpled gayly. She made one of the group about him, while Lance told how illness had broken out in the school, and the boys had all suddenly to be dismissed.

"Well," remarked Joan, "if it wasn't perfectly killing kind of illness, I must say I'm glad; and oh, Lance, Lance, Lance! you're just in time!"

"There's always something to be in time for with you, Joan," laughed Lance, pinching his little sister's ear softly. "What is it now?"

"Oh, it's Laura's play," whispered Joan. "It's to be a surprise for Phyl's birthday."

"Is there a very sanguinary part for me, Lollie?" said Lance. "Remember the last time I killed every one beautifully."

Laura colored and bit her lip. "If you are going to make fun of it, Lance," she began.

"But I've no such idea," he said, good-humoredly. "Now when I can get something to eat, I'd like to hear more of it. I feel a raving craving within me."

Alfred's eyes grew big. "There's a whole row of pies

cooling down-stairs," he said, "and doughnuts; I saw them!"

"And The Great didn't eat any of them?"

"*Didn't he?*" said Joan, with her mouth curled almost out of sight. "He just *went for them.*"

Lance laughed heartily, and they all turned back to the house, where Mr. Rolf stood waiting to see his son, and Phyllis was bustling about in the dining-room, preparing an impromptu sort of dinner for her favorite brother.

Nan followed Joan into the dining-room. She was greatly interested in seeing anything about the house, and almost directly the influence of Cousin Phyllis's pretty, dainty taste had reached her. The dining-room was a large one, and full of sunshine and flowers; it seemed to Nan, and it looked very plainly, the sort of room in which a large, merry family of young people would like to eat their meals. Phyllis might look to Nan a very grand young lady, but she was evidently not above setting the table, and arranging the little dinner which Martha, the house-maid, brought in on a tray; and between whiles Nan saw her dust one or two places on the sideboard, and put things straight here and there, quite with the air of a person accustomed to performing such household duties.

"Why," pondered Nan, as she stood in one of the windows—"why had Phyllis seemed so fine a lady in Brom-

field, so anxious to cut Nan adrift from her step-aunt's family?" Had the girl been a little older and wiser she would have understood it better, or have been able to make clearer distinctions. Phyllis's one point of intensest pride was *family*. To her it was everything that she was a Miss Rolf of Beverley. She knew better than the others how many times they had had to pinch and save, and turn here and there to keep up what she called "appearances;" but, at all events, nothing "vulgar" had ever come near them. Did she, I wonder, think it more honorable to be a "Rolf," and often owe the butcher and the baker, than to have been a plain somebody or nobody, who knew not the dishonor of debt?

Lance professed himself well satisfied with his dinner, and he sat down between Phyllis and Laura, and talked eagerly; the younger members of the family sitting on the ledges of the windows and looking on admiringly, Nan close to Joan, who kept up a little whispered murmur about the play.

By this time Nan knew its plot. It was as follows: A person, called simply a "Knight," takes captive a young person who speaks an unknown tongue. He brings her to his people, among whom is a Magician who alone can understand her. To him she tells her sad history, how she is a princess of the "Gondulfo tribe;" and, to prove it, she

calls upon the magician to light up his lamp, and rub a certain ring she wears, and he can see her family. These personages appear, one after another, at the back of the stage. The Magician recognizes among them his own long-lost nephew, the princess's brother, and as the spirits vanish he cries out, "You are then my niece, Artemisia Gondulfo." She admits that she is; the Knight appears; a general understanding follows, and the Magician pours upon Artemisia the wealth he has gathered for years, while she marries the Knight, who leads her back to the Gondulfos with rejoicing.

"Don't you think," whispered Nan, "that perhaps the people will want to know *where* the princess came from?"

Joan looked really troubled. "Now, see here, Nan," she said, as serenely as she could, "I can just see how you are always going to take things: you want them so—illiterate;" Joan stammered, and added, "No, I don't mean exactly that; I mean *literal*. Did you ever hear people in a real theatre, for instance, stand up and ask questions?"

Nan found she knew of no such occasion; but she had only twice been in a real theatre. She added:

"Oh, *dear!*" said Joan, "I don't mind telling you a secret, Nan: I *think*, when I'm older, I shall be an *actress*."

"Oh, Joan!" came from Nan, in a dismayed undertone.

"Well, I *think so*," said Joan, looking very grave. And

Nan hardly knew whether to be most horrified or awe-struck.

But just now Joan had other things to think of. While Lance was finishing his dinner, she suggested taking Nan up to the room she shared with Laura; and the two went out up the stairs to a breezy bedroom, which at once showed that two people with very different tastes or ideas occupied it. One side plainly showed Laura's finical, sentimental sort of fancies; the other Joan's restless, careless, active spirit. There were two little iron beds; the floor was covered with a bright-flowered carpet, and the walls were full of pictures; some, it is true, only cuts from illustrated papers, but all well selected. There were dormer windows, and in one a cage with two canaries. Joan displayed her special treasures to Nan, sitting on the floor before an old trunk, in which were some dolls' clothes, some bits of finery saved for theatricals, and which Joan called "properties," and various books and shells, and even some minerals.

"Oh, Joan!" exclaimed Nan, "I wish you knew Philip!" The sight of the minerals brought back the crowded little parlor in Bromfield, where, perhaps, even now Philip was busy among his precious belongings.

Joan looked up, her gray eyes widely open.

"Who's Philip?" she said, in a way Nan would have thought brusque or rough before she knew how loving Joan's heart really was.

Nan told her all about Philip, and something of Marian. The two girls decided they would ask Phyllis or Aunt Letty if Nan might not write to Philip. Joan entered very heartily into this idea, and it produced so many puckerings of her nose and mouth, that finally Nan burst out into an irrepressible laugh.

"Oh, Joan!" she exclaimed, "you do draw up your face *so* funnily!"

"Yes," said good-humored Joan, laughing with Nan, "*don't I.*" She jumped up and went over to the looking-glass, where she scrutinized her thin little face very carefully. "See here, Nan," she said, turning round, "just see how my flesh hangs." She pulled at her cheeks, and made various other demonstrations of the kind. "Papa says I *must* fill out, or I'll be *so ugly*"—here Joan made her very worst pucker—"that no one will be able to look at me without—well, nearly fainting away."

Nan laughed again until the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Joan," she said, sobering finally, "I'll promise to love you always."

But Joan only stood still, shaking her head solemnly.

"Are you *sure*, Nan?" she answered.

"Perfectly sure," said Nan; and upon this Joan dived into her little trunk and produced a small note-book.

"Let's write it down," she said, very earnestly; "What's the day of the month?"

Nan said it was May 29th; so Joan entered the date, and underneath it wrote: "Annice and Joan Rolf this day decide to be perfectly true friends. They will never let anything separate them."

"Now," said Joan, "let us each sign it; but Annice—or Nan—first we ought to do something a little solemn; throw beans over our heads, or something like that."

Nan hesitated, and her face flushed. "Joan," she said, quietly, "I don't think that is half so solemn—as—as—something—like a little—kind of a prayer."

Joan looked a trifle puzzled; "Well," she asserted.

Nan took her cousin's hand very firmly.

"Suppose," she said, "we say—together—God bless this."

Nan could think of nothing more elaborate; but the two children, standing, together signed their names to the queer little compact, and then together said—not knowing half how solemn it really was—"God bless this."

For a moment or two they did not speak; but when the tea-bell rang they went down-stairs very merrily—on the last flight, indeed, Joan showed Nan how to slide down on the banisters, a performance Alfred and Dicksie greeted with cheers from the porch below.

CHAPTER XVI.

NAN awoke early the next morning. A stream of light flooded her room; everything looked bright and inspiring, and the little girl ran down-stairs, gayly humming one of Bertie Rolf's songs.

It was Saturday; except for the exercises to be rewritten, there would be no work; and above all reasons for joy was the fact that Lance had promised to come and take Nan and Joan out in his boat. Aunt Letitia's consent was given. Nan needed nothing further, she believed, in the way of enjoyment, since the sun had chosen to shine out so gayly, and she felt so happy since yesterday, when Aunt Letty had folded her in her arms and let her cry unrestrained on her shoulder.

"Where is Lance going to take you, Annice?" her aunt asked, while they were at breakfast.

But Nan could not say; and just then Lance himself appeared in a regular flannel boating-suit.

"But where is Joan?" Nan asked.

"She had a cold," said Lance, "and Phyllis wouldn't hear

of her coming." The boy seemed to feel thoroughly at home. He sat down at the end of the table and asked Robert for a glass of water, while Miss Rolfe offered him a cutlet and some cakes.

"No, thank you, Cousin Letty," said Lance; "I've had my breakfast. How soon can Annice be ready?"

Nan commenced hurrying every mouthful, until she caught a stern look from her aunt.

"She can't go for half an hour after breakfast," said the old lady. "Do you think me crazy, Lancelot? The idea of any one's taking violent exercise directly after eating!"

This settled it; although a little defiant look came between Lance's well-marked eyebrows and around the curves of his handsome mouth. Nan felt a trifle afraid that perhaps Lance was high-tempered. Certainly he looked now as though he was not always the laughing idol of the family he had seemed to be yesterday.

Breakfast was finished at last, and Lance followed Miss Rolf and Nan out into the garden, where the old lady sauntered about among her rose-bushes, and Nan kept her gaze almost fixed upon the town-clock, the face of which she could see gleaming through the trees.

Mrs. Heriot appeared at a side door to say a word of welcome to Lance, whose face brightened visibly, and Nan saw what a favorite he was with this old servant. Then, at last,

with what seemed aggravating slowness, the hands of the clock moved around to nine o'clock. The half-hour was over! Nan gave a little skip, and darted in for her shade-hat and her gloves, and in a few moments more, after many injunctions from Aunt Letty, she was, with Lance, going across fields at the back of the house to the river.

Almost at once Lance said: "Nan, your cousin Philip is at our school."

"*What?*" ejaculated Nan.

"Yes," said Lance. "He came last week, and I must say he passed very well; and it's a shame we had to break up so soon."

"But, Lance," said Nan, with a very serious face, "isn't yours a very expensive school?"

"Of course—but"—Lance shrugged his broad young shoulders—"there he is—that's all I know."

Nan remained wonderingly silent, but of course she felt full of delight, well knowing how very much Philip had desired the means of a thorough classical education. What the Bromfield public school afforded him had never half satisfied the lad's yearnings. But now he could do what he chose! Nan gave Lance's hand a happy squeeze.

"I'm *so* glad," she said, earnestly. Lance nodded, as much as to say he appreciated her feelings, and in a few moments they were by the river-bank, where Lance's boat

was moored. It was a light little boat, with nice cushions and a fine pair of oars. Lance seated Nan comfortably, and asked her if she knew how to steer, and then they pushed off. The boat was named the *Phyllis*, and this made Nan say:

"Lance, isn't Cousin Phyllis very good to you all? "

Lance smiled. "I think she *is*," he said, heartily; "you see mother died when Bertie was only four, and since then Phil has had it all to see to; she never thinks of herself!"

Nan was not entirely of Lance's opinion, but she said presently:

"Lance, what do you think it means *really* not to think of yourself?"

"Not to think of yourself?" Lance looked across the river, while he rowed, with a wondering expression. "Well, Nan," he said, in a moment, "I suppose it means being thoughtful about other people."

"Well, not only that," said Nan, earnestly; "it must mean—to know and understand yourself, but to *care* more for other people's happiness."

Lance pulled one or two very good strokes before he spoke; then he said, gravely:

"Yes, Nan, I believe that must be it. You see, you girls have a sort of an easy time of it, but boys always have to

rough things, and to do for themselves. I don't know how it is, we never get a real out-and-out chance at being good."

Nan opened her hazel eyes widely. "Lance," she exclaimed, "I *do* think you are wrong! You can say, if you like, that boys have more to *fight out*; but I'm sure girls have things, too, that are just, *just* as hard; and, although I'm glad to be a girl, sometimes I feel *shut in* by it."

"What would you do if you were a boy, Nan?" Lance asked, smiling. "Come, now; perhaps you can do it as it is."

"Well," said Nan, slowly, "I think I'd like to go about among poor, rough boys, for one thing, and help them."

"And get your head well punched for you."

"Oh, well, I mean to try and make them know better—to be one with them. I *feel* as if I could do something worth while that way; but, Lance, I want to confide something to you," added Nan, very seriously.

"All right—I won't tell;" the boy's dark young face softened as he looked at the little girl before him, with her sweet, serious, earnest air.

"Well, then—I'm afraid I'll never be much of a credit to Aunt Letitia as a *scholar*, Lance. Whatever the reason is, I *don't* care for study."

"But you think you might be worth something else?"

"Yes, that is it. Oh, Lance, how kind you are!" said Nan; "you understand it all so quickly."

"What do you think of, then, Nan, when you find you don't care for study? Still, I shouldn't call you downright stupid."

"Oh, yes!" Nan averred, shaking her head solemnly; "all the Miss Priors and the Miss Joneses in the world never could make me what Miss Prior calls *brilliant*. Don't you suppose I know it well enough? You see at Uncle Rupert's nobody cared; but here I've made *so* much more of an effort—and—it's no use; but I think about doing something very busy and very useful. You see, I do understand more about poor people than rich."

Lance looked at his little cousin with more respect than if she had been construing Virgil by the page.

"Nan," he said, leaning forward and speaking impressively, "do you stick to that, then. Don't give up your books—why should you?—but don't bother your poor little head trying to be brilliant over them. Now, see here, do you want to go and see an old boat-builder I know?"

Nan professed herself only too delighted. Lance rowed on. The river ran very wide just here, and Nan many years later remembered just that moment—the look of the clearly flowing water, the May sky, Lance's strong young figure, and, above all, the sort of strength the boy's words

had given her. She felt more hopeful than she had thought it possible ever to be the day before.

The boat-builder's workshop was a roomy though rather dilapidated building, near the water's edge, just above a little bank of tangled greens. He kept a dozen boats for hire, and these were rocking gently near the shore. When Lance pulled up and helped Nan out, the boatman came to the doorway of his workshop and nodded pleasantly. He was a tall, grizzled old man, with a face full of puckers, some of which seemed to have gotten there by laughing.

"How do you do, Mr. Blake?" said Lance, pleasantly. "May I bring my little cousin in to see the boat you're building?"

"Certain, certain," said the old man, and he turned around and led the way into the shop, where a long scull was turned upside down on trestles, and which Lance examined with delight, for he had all a young collegian's enthusiasm for boating. Nan looked on, interested in the conversation which went back and forth rapidly between Lance and the old man. Then she sauntered back to the river door, where she was suddenly attracted by the sight of a very ragged little boy.

He was a child apparently nine or ten years of age, and his face was pinched and pitifully haggard. He stood very still near Lance's boat, from which he now glanced up timidly at Nan in the shop-door.

"Please," he said, in a tired sort of voice, "is there any job about I could get?"

"Oh!" said Nan, quickly; her heart was impulsively full of compassion. She ran down nearer to the little boy, who suddenly turned whiter than before, and staggered against one of the posts of the small pier.

"Lance!" cried Nan, so eagerly that her cousin darted out, and, with one glance and a "By George!" under his breath, he caught the boy's now fainting figure.

Mr. Blake was soon with them; and after they had revived the boy so that he languidly opened his eyes, the boatman said, "It's hunger has done it. Poor little chap, we'll settle that. Come, my lad, can ye get as fur as my house?" And he jerked his head to the right of the workshop.

But the poor little fellow only laid his head back wearily against Lance's shoulder, and the latter said,

"I'll carry him, Blake—he's as light as a feather."

So they made a procession quietly through the workshop and out across a bit of roadway, to where Blake's cosy, old-fashioned white cottage was standing. The box walks smelt pleasantly, and the lilac bushes were in profusion near the door; but, for all the cool sweetness of things, the poor little boy showed no interest in what was being done for or with him. Lance, followed by Nan, carried the child into the little parlor, the door of which Blake opened



"LANCE, FOLLOWED BY NAN, CARRIED THE CHILD."

quietly, after which he turned and called down the passage, "Love!"

"Yes, father," came back in cheery tones from the kitchen, and a bright-faced, tidy young girl of about fifteen appeared.

Her father made her understand very quickly what had happened, Nan thought—for she was up-stairs and down again in a moment with a pillow and a shawl, and helped Lance very skilfully, as he laid the boy on the horse-hair sofa; and in another moment she was back again with a glass of milk, with just a "trifle of wine in it," she said, and a fresh-looking roll, which would have tempted any one. But, half-dead though he was of starvation, it seemed hard for the boy to eat. He swallowed a few mouthfuls, and then closed his eyes exhaustedly. Blake was questioning him, when his daughter, in her gentle, motherly way, lifted a hand, and said,

"Not now, father; wait a little. He must rest first."

And Nan thought she had never heard a sweeter voice. It was girlish and soft, but it had in it such womanly tones that one wondered at her youth—for she was plainly not older than Lance—indeed, the curve of her cheek was very childish, and her eyes, though they were quiet, motherly eyes as they looked at the poor boy, had the peculiar sweetness and innocence of a child.

"Shall I go for a doctor, Love?" Blake asked. He seemed to be full of respect for his little maiden.

"Well, yes, father, perhaps you had better," she said, carefully.

"I'll go," suggested Lance.

And then Nan said, almost in Love's ear, "Can I do anything?"

Love nodded. "Yes," she said, "supposing you were not to mind helping me get a better place ready for him."

Nan looked her pleasure, and Love added,

"Father, will you sit here? Now come with me, please."

Nan liked her gentle authoritative ways very much. She followed the little mistress of the house up-stairs, and into a cool, clean room, evidently kept for company; for, although the white curtains were fresh in the windows, the bed was only covered over with pink netting.

"Love," as Nan called her in her mind, took out her keys and opened the drawers of the old-fashioned bureau, from which she took some lavender-scented sheets and pillowcases and a snowy counterpane, and, with no apologies, she allowed Nan to help her make up the bed.

"Aren't you Miss Rolf's niece?" she said, smiling at Nan across the sheet they were tucking in.

"Yes," said Nan; "and do you keep house here all alone with your father? and is your name really Love?"

The young girl laughed. "Oh," she said, "that's always been father's name for me. My name is really Margaret. Yes, I keep house for father; mother is an invalid, she never comes down-stairs. There! for a young lady, you did very well."

Nan was about to say she had done housework for two years past, but checked herself as Margaret Blake exclaimed:

"There is the doctor. Young Mr. Rolf was quick."

The two girls went down-stairs, and found a young doctor bending over the boy, who certainly looked a little better. When Margaret told of her preparations up-stairs, the doctor said he had better have a warm bath and be put to bed; "that is," he was beginning, "if—"

"Oh, yes," said Love, cheerily, "of course we'll keep him here awhile, any way."

Half an hour later the languid little figure was lying comfortably in the sweet-smelling bed up-stairs, and his new friends had been able to learn something of his history.

He had come, he said, with his mother a long way—they had walked it nearly all. Since father had died, and mother had been so ill, they had nearly starved; but they had come here to see the manager of the Beverley theatre, hoping mother could get something to do.

"Had she been on the stage?" the doctor asked.

"Oh, yes," the boy said, "and she heard the manager here had known father."

"And where is she now, my boy?"

"Oh, she's down at the theatre, sir, waiting to see Mr. Burton. There's a matinee going on. I just came along the river to see if I couldn't get an odd job."

Nan listened with growing fascination. What would Joan say to this! and how more than ever awe-struck was she when the doctor said:

"Then I'll go down to the theatre and find her. And, Lance," he added, "will you come? I may need you."

Lance was almost as delighted by the novelty of the idea as Nan had been; for, like all young people, a theatre, and, above all, "behind the scenes," seemed to him the most fascinating and mysterious of all places. He needed no second bidding, and, promising Nan that he would send word of her whereabouts to Aunt Letitia, they started off.

Meanwhile, Nan sat by the boy's bedside, while "Love" went down-stairs to the performance of some household duties.

Nan looked at the little white sleeping face, wondering what he could tell of that vaguely mysterious and wholly delightful place—the theatre.

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL his life long Lance thought he would remember that morning's expedition. Dr. Rogers knew his way perfectly to the Beverley Opera House *stage-entrance*, having more than once been called in in sudden cases of illness; but Lance wondered how he could take the visit in such a very cool sort of way.

"I suppose you never before went behind the scenes of a theatre," he said, looking at Lance's eager young face.

"No, sir," Lance said, "I don't suppose my father would object to my going now with you."

"I'll make that all right," the doctor said. And Lance, feeling his only misgiving removed, went on full of suppressed excitement.

Dr. Rogers had known many people in what is always called "the profession;" but to Lance it seemed, from what he told him, as though he knew chiefly the sad and toilsome sides of their lives. The hard work—both of appearing gay when most weary, and of being morning, noon, and night either rehearsing or acting, or hanging

about managers' or treasurers' offices, or doleful green-rooms. Now, to Lance, a "green-room" meant such a place as he had seen described in lives of Garrick or Goldsmith; where the great beaux and wits of the day gathered, and where the sparkle of gems, the clinking of glasses, and the gayety of voices aided a brilliant scene.

"This way," Dr. Rogers said, as they turned down a little side alley at one side of the theatre. Outside were flaring placards of the "Great Spectacular Drama," being performed with one hundred dancers, some real horses, and a chariot—all splendors which he would fain have witnessed from the front of the house; but while Mr. Rolf encouraged his boy to see first-class theatrical representations, he would have forbidden his attending this lower order of vulgar display, and Lance led too frank a life to do in secret what he knew his father and Phyllis would condemn.

Some warehouses were at one side, and, wedged in between them, Lance saw a narrow doorway with a flight of steps leading underground; above the door was written in half-legible characters, "*Stage Entrance. No Admittance.*" The doctor, however, pushed on, descending the stairs followed by Lance. A rough-looking lad was standing at the foot of the steps, evidently on guard; but the doctor simply said, "All right," and passed on, with Lance close beside him. They groped their way along a dark passage, to the

left of which was a flight of rickety steps, and up these they hurried, Lance wondering how soon the air would feel anything but damp and draughty. Below he had remarked various pieces of stage carpentry, and Dr. Rogers explained to him that it was there much of the necessary stage work was executed.

At the top of the stairs they found themselves in a labyrinth of side-scenes, beams, and pulleys—all the mechanical part of the Grand Spectacular Drama about to be performed. Men were running here and there; from high up in what looked like scaffoldings Lance could hear voices—the stage-carpenter calling out this and that direction with various strong expressions—while already, in the narrow spaces behind the scenes, the actors and actresses were beginning to move about. There was some gaslight, but usually a cold stream of daylight fell in upon the painted faces and tawdry-looking costumes, which would soon have the aid of the footlights and the illusions of a happy country audience. But here everything looked what it really was; and oh, in spite of paint and powder, how weary some of the faces looked! A group of young girls, thinly dressed, were gathered together near one of the side-scenes, and Lance overheard them discussing whether they would have much to pay in fines out of their salaries that night. One girl, who, singular to say, was occupied in darning stock-

ings, declared if she were to be fined again for being "just one minute late," she couldn't stand it. "I'll starve next," she said, with a sad laugh.

"Do you know where Mr. Burton is?" the doctor asked of one of these young people.

"Yes, sir," she answered, very politely; "I think he's in the green-room."

The word green-room sent a thrill of delight to Lance's heart, and Dr. Rogers led the way directly across the stage, where already a fairy scene was set; but Lance could not help a feeling of surprise and disappointment as he found himself passing pasteboard trees, and a grotto made up of the queerest odds and ends; while at one side the most coarsely painted stream trickled over painted rocks. But the green-room was ahead of him. Dr. Rogers made his way into a small, scantily furnished room, bare and completely dismal. Here were gathered two or three people in costumes of a somewhat better description than the girls they had seen grouped together. One young man was putting some additional touches to his eyebrows at a cracked mirror, and a stout, elaborately dressed lady was talking earnestly to the manager. Only a few chairs and a table of the roughest description furnished what Lance had to believe was actually a green-room! His illusions were certainly gone, but he was glad to have seen it, at all

events, and he began now to think more earnestly of their errand.

Dr. Rogers courteously explained to Mr. Burton that he had come to inquire the whereabouts of a woman named Travers. At this, one of the company near the door said, "Oh, Travers is in my dressing-room. Do you want to see her?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry for her," said Mr. Burton, well knowing that Dr. Rogers's errand was charity; "and I've taken her on with us a few weeks as dresser; but I'm afraid she won't hold out. She's a pretty sick woman."

The lady who had spoken said, "Will you come and see her, sir?"

Mr. Burton seemed very busy, and Dr. Rogers followed the good-humored actress, who was glittering with spangles and paste jewelry, up a rickety staircase to a little box of a room, noisy and ill-ventilated.

On a half-broken-down chair there sat a thin, hollow-eyed woman, who apparently felt too listless to move; scarcely looking up when the actress said, kindly, "Mollie, here's a doctor, who says he has the boy."

At this she brightened, and, on hearing what had occurred at Mr. Blake's, she expressed a desire to go at once to the child; but as she rose it was only too evident that her strength would not admit of her walking one block,

and so the kind-hearted doctor whispered to Lance, "Suppose you get a hack, my boy, from the depot; and here, a little port wine wouldn't hurt her."

"Oh, sir," said the actress, "we gave her all the dinner she'd take; and I'm sure we'd all do anything we could for her. She was with our company six months before Travers died. But I'm sure, as a physician, you can tell she's not fit for work."

Lance threaded his way out into the street, and soon returned to say the hack was waiting. They assisted poor Mrs. Travers out into it, several of the company taking a kindly interest in the poor creature's departure. As they left, Lance could hear the orchestra playing gayly, and the voice of the stage-manager calling to the dancers, "This way, my dears; hurry up; no nonsense now!"

And as he looked at the pale, haggard face of Mrs. Travers, he wondered how she had thought of renewing a life in which, it already seemed to him, there could be nothing but weariness and pain.



THE DOCTOR AND LANCE FIND MRS. TRAVERS.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NAN's brain worked very busily with schemes for the Travers' future, while she sat by little David's bedside. She determined to do all Aunt Letty would allow her to for the boy, whom she felt as if she had "found," and she thought it seemed almost in answer to the talk she and Lance had had in the boat that very morning.

While her mind was working with a dozen highly colored fancies for the future, she heard the sound of wheels outside the little garden, and, stealing to the window, saw, to her great joy, the Rolf House carriage, from which Aunt Letitia herself was descending.

Nan fairly held her breath while she heard Miss Rolf speaking below to Love, and then came the rustle of silk along the little corridor, and Miss Rolf gently entered the room.

Nan started forward, catching her aunt's hand and looking up with beaming eyes at her.

"Oh, Aunt Letty," she whispered, "how glad I am you came!"

"I wanted my own little runaway," said Miss Rolf, smil-

ing good-humoredly; "and, Nan, tell me more about this poor little boy." So Nan repeated the story, and then, while she stood in the window by her aunt, she begged that he and his mother might be provided for.

"If you'd let me, aunt—my pocket-money," faltered Nan, who had been just two weeks in receipt of an allowance of half a dollar.

Miss Rolf smiled. She remained thinking a moment, and then said, very gently: "I'll see that he is cared for, Nan, and then—if it turns out well—I'll speak to you of a plan I have."

Nan pressed her aunt's hand warmly; and as Margaret came up now, Miss Rolf turned to her and asked if it would be quite convenient to her father and herself to let the poor wanderers *board* there a week or two. Margaret said she was sure of it; and a querulous voice across the hall calling her name, she added in an undertone, "Perhaps, Miss Rolf, you wouldn't mind speaking to mother about it?"

And Miss Rolf, who thoroughly understood Mrs. Blake's caprices, went across the hall into the room where the invalid sat in an easy-chair, every comfort about her that the hard work and the tenderness of her husband and child could procure. But Mrs. Blake, as somebody said, would be one to complain that her heavenly crown was uncomfortable, so completely dissatisfied was she with everything. Miss Rolf, however, was in her eyes the one human being she could

submit to. When she was a young girl she had known the old lady, who had procured for her her place as district school-teacher, from which she felt she "descended" to marry honest Joel Blake. It was easy for Miss Rolf to make Mrs. Blake consent to the Travers' boarding there until she, Miss Rolf, decided what permanent home could be found; and, while they were discussing it, Lance returned to say that the doctor had been obliged to take poor Mrs. Travers to the Cottage Hospital he superintended, and which was largely under Miss Rolf's patronage. The poor woman was certainly very ill. So only little David was to be left on Margaret's willing hands. Miss Rolf departed, promising to send Mrs. Heriot over directly to see what Margaret needed, and, leaving his boat in Blake's charge, Lance drove home with Nan and his Cousin Letty.

The morning had been to Nan full of excitement, but the afternoon was to contain even a greater amount. Nan knew that her aunt was very thoughtful, and when she sent word at four o'clock asking Dr. Rogers to call at Rolf House to take tea, something in the way she spoke of it to Nan impressed the little girl as though plans were being made in which she was concerned; and after tea the mystery was solved. Nan and Lance were in the drawing-room, the latter eagerly relating his experience at the theatre, when they heard Dr. Rogers leaving the house, and in a moment Nan was sent for to the black-walnut parlor.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was still daylight, and as Nan entered the parlor she saw Miss Rolf seated in one of the windows before her writing-table, and on it were strewn some papers, evidently recently in use.

Never had Aunt Letty's voice been kinder than when she said, "Come over here, Annice, and sit down. I want to tell you my plan."

So Nan did as she was told, and then Aunt Letty, after a little fumbling among her papers, said: "I told you I had a plan; but I wanted to discuss the wisdom of it with Dr. Rogers before I spoke of it to you."

"Yes, aunt," said Nan, with her eyes fixed on Miss Rolf's face.

"It is this, then, my dear. If—if I see fit to leave you in my will any large sum of money, you must know that the use of it is a great—a *great* responsibility. Money is not given us just for ourselves, Annice. We owe our use of it not only to God, who let us have it, but to those who have daily need of it. I should suffer greatly if I thought I was

the means of your misusing any money I might leave you. I would rather see you work hard for your daily bread than have to sin by ill-using any fortune. I wear rich clothes, but these I always care for, and you do not know how little I *really* spend; but were I to buy simply for the sake of decking my person I should call it a misuse of the money God has seen fit to let me have. Nothing is more odious than a pompous, a purse-proud, or a miserly rich person." Aunt Letty broke off here with a smile. "I must not make my sermon too long, dear. I wanted first to make you feel the importance of the trust I am going to give you. Now, then—"

Nan's whole heart shone in her face—she felt impressed—excited—yet bewildered.

"Now I have thought," said Miss Rolf, "for some time, of making you give away certain sums in charity, and it occurred to me to-day that a very good plan would be for you to have, in a certain way, the charge of this poor mother and her child."

"Oh!" ejaculated Nan.

"I would not give you the money outright to spend for them, for you are too young for that; but at certain stores in town you could have credit, and, while I would superintend everything, you would buy everything for them. What I would exact from you would be a strictly kept account-book.

My bills would come in once in six months, but you would have to show me your book every week or month."

Nan's eyes nearly danced out of her head.

"Of course, if I found you were too young for this," Miss Rolf continued, "it could be given up any time; but Miss Prior assures me your strongest point is for figures, and you can at once learn regularly keeping accounts. Then I shall expect you to think out plans for your people, and we will talk them over."

But as to talking now! it seemed to Nan absolutely impossible. She could find neither words nor thoughts which seemed coherent, only within her heart was something like a quiet prayer that nearly ended in sobs.

When Miss Rolf had discussed her plan with Dr. Rogers, she had said: "I feel sure I am right about this child. She has a real vocation for good works, and this discipline will steady her, while the work will please her thoroughly."

And Dr. Rogers had agreed with Miss Rolf fully.

Lance was summoned soon after, and Miss Rolf and he and Nan talked over a good plan for comforting the wanderers. I say talked—but it was Nan who only listened with glistening eyes and a beating heart. How she longed to confide in Joan! It seemed an eternity to wait to see her, but it would not do, she felt sure, to indulge impatience of this sort just at the very outset.

Early the next morning Phyllis came over, by Miss Rolf's request, to continue the fascinating discussion. It was evident that she scarcely believed Nan old enough for such a responsibility, but of course, as Miss Rolf said, that could so easily be taken from her that it was assuredly worth the trial.

Miss Rolf's idea was that a cottage could be taken for Mrs. Travers, and that David could go to school in the mornings and work at Rolf House in the afternoons. Miss Rolf had no idea of bringing the boy up to idleness. Should he ever show any special talent for one of the higher professions, that could be developed later, or even if he showed talent for classical study, time could be given him for such.

Driving to church, Nan looked eagerly at every possible cottage; but it was not until some days later—when Mrs. Travers was decidedly better, and David quite well enough to sit up nearly all day, that the cottage was found. One morning Dr. Rogers came into Rolf House, saying:

"Well, Nan, I've just what will suit you, I think, in the way of a cottage."

Nan blushed and smiled.

"May I take her with me, Miss Rolf?" the good doctor went on. And, Miss Rolf assenting readily, Nan was soon in the doctor's gig, driving along the river road near to Mr. Blake's.

He explained that he had come upon a widow who, with her daughter, occupied a very comfortable cottage so much too large for their requirements that they were very willing to let one half of it to Nan for Mrs. Travers. As Mrs. Travers must always be an invalid, it would be better for her to have some one else in the house with her while David was so young.

"I had thought of that, doctor," said Nan, shyly.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the doctor, "so you really *can* think, puss. That's a good beginning."

Nan would have been much better pleased had Lance and Joan been with her, still she certainly enjoyed the expedition. The cottage stood in a little garden of its own, and there was nice pasture for a cow, and Mrs. Holt, the occupant, was very well pleased to show the doctor and Nan the rooms she designed to let. There were three—a sitting-room, quite comfortably furnished, and a small and a large bedroom, and Mrs. Holt was willing to undertake Mrs. Travers's cooking. Everything looked bright and cheerful, and four dollars a week for the rooms did not seem too much; but Nan hesitated—ought she to make the bargain then and there? She glanced at the doctor, but he said nothing until she whispered the inquiry; then he said:

"You didn't ask about her charges for cooking. Better have Mrs. Travers send in her own food."

Nan felt, foolishly, as though this had been a great oversight on her part ; but she soon arranged to pay fifty cents more a week for the cooking, and then the doctor handed her a little note-book, in which she was to enter these negotiations.

Nan had a sort of feeling that Phyllis would not like the rooms. The little parlor was certainly very gaudy and its ornaments cheap-looking ; but she reflected—perhaps they might change that before Mrs. Travers took possession. She would ask Phyllis's advice.

CHAPTER XX.

JOAN stood outside of the school-room door in Rolf House, knocking very timidly. It was half-past three—lessons *must* be over; but then, thought Joan, with a little screw to her nose, *that* Miss Prior would probably keep Nan until the very last possible minute!

“Come in,” a cold voice said, and Joan opened the door, looking in on the large, bare room, with Nan in its centre, and Miss Prior, with her head bound up from toothache, listening to her arithmetic.

Things were going better just at this moment, for Nan had quite a genius for figures, and Miss Prior enjoyed anything mathematical. The lesson was just over. Miss Prior was glad to go home and take care of her suffering face, and so Joan soon found herself alone with her cousin.

“Well, Nan!” she exclaimed, “Cousin Letty thinks it best for *Laura* to go out with us when you buy the things. That, I suppose, is to keep me in order.”

Joan grimaced and laughed, and Nan said, quickly,

“Well, let’s not mind, Joan. Do you know, I fancy *Laura* hasn’t *much* real pleasure.”

Joan, who had seated herself in the window, looked around with a laugh.

"Oh yes, she has, Nan," she said; "she is always with those Phillipses we go to school with, and the Tempests; and they have all the fun they want. And she considers herself now quite a young lady."

"She is only fourteen," said Nan.

"Well, she *feels* two hundred and four," said Joan. "Come, Nan, tell me what you're going to buy."

Nan was, on this eventful morning, starting out to make her first purchases, as it were, on her own account. She was to buy clothes for David, some dresses and other things for Mrs. Travers, and various minor comforts for the household and their personal needs. Miss Rolf preferred leaving her entirely to herself in these matters for one week. After that, when the first accounts were presented, she decided that she could judge of Nan's fitness for her new responsibility. The old lady had notified various merchants in town that her niece was to be given credit, and so everything was in train.

Nan hardly liked to confess even to Joan her sense of importance and excitement, as she started out in the big family carriage with Laura and Joan, and Mrs. Heriot, who had come in a way to matronize the youthful party. Joan busied her dark head over Nan's list, calling upon her every

now and then to decipher figures or writing. In the generosity of her nature she felt no jealousy of Nan's position—only a pleasurable sense of her cousin's importance. Laura liked the excitement of it, but, although impressed by Nan's new power, was inclined to be supercilious. She smiled upon Joan's little enthusiasms, and looked at Nan very patronizingly.

They stopped first before Messrs. Ames & Ames's large dry-goods store, and there Nan was reminded of her first purchases with Cousin Phyllis. How long ago it seemed, and how little she had then thought to be so soon in such a position herself!

Two nice suits for David were bought, and various minor articles, and then Mrs. Travers's dresses had to be chosen. Here Laura became decisive in her opinions, and Mrs. Heriot gave some sound advice; while Nan's fancy wavered between a green camel's-hair and a nice dark linen, and a light-brown wool and a gayer calico. The former were chosen, at last, and their etceteras; and then it was that the clerk asked the address, and Laura, whose spirits had perceptibly risen, leaned forward over Nan's shoulder, saying,

"Miss Rolf said, I believe, it was all to be charged."

"Oh, certainly, miss, certainly!" rejoined the clerk; and Laura looked well satisfied.



NAN MAKING HER PURCHASES.

Now Nan felt, for a moment or two, a rush of indignation. Why couldn't Laura have left her alone? But suddenly the thought came into her mind—was this all done for *her* pleasure, or to discipline and help her to help others? This brought peace. Nan was able to move to the next department, and bring herself to ask Laura's advice in a gentle voice.

Miss Rolf had suggested buying some books, and at Ames's were two well-stocked counters, from which Laura was asked to select one or two nice volumes of history, and the same of romance and poetry. Laura's taste, like Phyllis's, was good; and the books, if a trifle sentimental, were well chosen. The carriage was loaded with parcels, and then the girls drove to Margaret Blake's.

Miss Rolf had desired Nan to choose little Love a silk dress—an article such as she had certainly never dreamed of possessing—and Nan had been delighted by the idea. She chose a pretty dark-brown silk, but Laura said Margaret would like a trimming of lighter silk; yet Nan remembered Love's quiet eyes, the sober, happy little face—she could not think of her in anything but pretty and simple gowns.

"I don't think, Laura," she said, gently, "that Love would like—a—*fashionable* kind of a dress; she wants something just *nice*!"

So Laura had laughed and turned away; and the re-

sult was that Nan had chosen the plain, pretty, brown silk.

As they drove down the river road towards the Blakes, Mrs. Heriot began to tell how David had spoken the night she had gone to ask what he needed. Mrs. Heriot, by this time, was Nan's stanch friend—and who could help being? Brilliant she never would be; yet every one who came near the child felt the loving tenderness of her heart—her eyes would look around at you, full of a liquid softness which had an appealing something in it which no one could resist.

Of course, of this party Nan was really prime mover; yet she remembered her aunt's words. If money were given her, she must *not* think of it as a means of making herself or any one else fine or grand or pompous; it was just to *help* those who lacked it.

Nan leaned back in the carriage, happy and excited, and no doubt feeling rather important; yet something of the sermon she had heard on Sunday ran in her mind. She could not have given the text, but the words pointed to a spirit of humbleness when happy things seemed to come suddenly. Poor little Nan! Hers had been a hard life, and she was scarcely fourteen; and, judged by the standard of Cousin Phyllis or Laura, or Miss Prior, she was not "*brilliant*." Yet in her heart was a steadfast longing to do whatever God had *meant* she should. Nan was a child, she could not

tell what she ought to do ; but yet heart and soul and meaning were all pure. If she had ever cherished a personal dislike, it was towards her cousin Laura Rolf ; but before the drive had brought them to the Blakes' door, she forced herself to look at Laura and say, gently, "Are you tired? Thank you for helping me." There was a real sense of comfort in feeling that she had so far conquered herself.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARGARET BLAKE was in the garden with little David when the happy party arrived; and he, who had already grown well acquainted with Nan, hurried forward with beaming eyes to open the gate for her. Then they all went into the parlor, where Love's dress was duly inspected, and David's heart delighted by a game Nan had bought for him. Margaret could not say enough to express her pleasure and gratification, and discussed with Mrs. Heriot how and where the dress had better be made. David was almost as interested in Love's present as she was herself; and, while they all stood talking, Mr. Blake appeared.

"Father," Love exclaimed, "just come and look!" She held up the pretty dark silk in a most fascinating fold. Laura was near her.

"Oh!" said Love, turning around with a pretty smile, "how well it looks with Miss Laura's hair!"

Poor Laura! vanity was her very weakest point; and as Margaret Blake shook out the brown silk near to her pretty blonde hair, she turned towards the glass with a most self-

“HOW WELL IT LOOKS WITH MISS LAURA'S HAIR!”



satisfied expression. It might have grown more complacent had not the mirror also reflected Joan, grimacing, and Nan's simple young face looking at Laura's very gravely.

"Nonsense, Margaret!" she exclaimed, coloring; but she thought how hard it was she could not always have—what Jane Phillips had, for instance—becoming and *stylish* dress. Laura's standards were regulated by a few very overdressed young people at the Beverley Academy.

When the party drove home, Nan's eager eyes saw Aunt Letty in the side-window of the walnut parlor. A smile that made Nan happy passed between her aunt and herself; and when she had fervently hugged Joan and bidden Laura a pleasant good-night, she and Mrs. Heriot went into the house, Nan dancing with anxiety to tell her aunt everything.

For just in those few days a close understanding had grown up between the old lady and the child. Nan felt like a new being from the lonely little girl who had one day, two weeks ago, walked down the staircase wishing herself in Bromfield. Her aunt's heart had opened to her, and she found love enough in it to satisfy her own. She well knew that in the test she was going through scrupulous exactness was all that would fill her aunt's sense of success; but then she decided she *would* be careful in every way.

After tea Miss Rolf and Nan went into the parlor, and

there on the writing-table lay two books, bound in Russia leather, and with "Annice Rolf" printed in gold letters on the covers.

"You see," said Aunt Letty, "one is to be for your accounts, the other for a sort of note-book in which you can enter anything you think the Traverses will need."

Nan was delighted, and Aunt Letty said she would leave her alone a little while that she might enter in her account-book the expenditures of the day.

Nan sat down in the window overlooking the terrace, and prepared her accounts carefully. Yet I am afraid this first page was rather wild in appearance. So far as figures and items read it was correct, and stood thus:

2 dresses for Mrs. Travers.....	14 50
There were two suits of clothes for David, and they were	9 00
4 collars.....	30
2 shirts.....	2 00
10 yards of unbleached muslin.....	80
A dark skirt.....	75
game and books.....	8
	<hr/>
	35 35

Nan summed up her badly-spelled account, and wondered if Aunt Letty would think it too much to have spent. She wished Lance were there to help her decision as well as her

figures; and she sat looking out of the window, biting the end of her pen, and wondering if she really *could* manage these business matters successfully. But, she reflected, if she only *could*, what a useful life she might lead. Aunt Letty would give her money, she felt sure, for every useful enterprise; and Nan was made, as her aunt nicely said, to be a "helper."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE day that Mrs. Travers and David were to be installed in their new home was one of intense excitement for all the young Rolfs. Mrs. Travers had been visited by various members of the theatrical company, one of whom—the lady in whose dressing-room Dr. Rogers had found the sick woman—had called at Rolf House to express her gratification and offer a little purse made up among the company.

Nan went with her aunt into the black-walnut parlor to see this lady—a genuine actress! and off the stage! Nan knew none of the differences in companies or performances, nor that the people playing “The Silver Grotto, or the Naiads’ Ring,” at the Beverley Opera House, were of the poor, struggling, and hard-worked kind who thought it luxury to have twenty dollars a week and their costumes “found.”

Mrs. Landor—known on the bills as “Miss Blanche Blake”—was sitting in the western window of the parlor, looking very much heated after her walk, when Miss Rolf entered. She had a large, fair, good-humored face, rather

the worse for all the paint and powder used on the stage; and her costume of faded lavender silk, lace mantilla, and flowery hat looked as though it might have done a great deal of duty on the boards. Miss Rolf greeted her most courteously, and whispered to Nan to have some lemonade and cake brought in.

"You see, madam," said Mrs. Landor to the old lady, "we thought we couldn't go off without sending Mollie something; so we just made up this little sum, hoping it would help things along."

"I'm sure you were all very thoughtful," said Miss Rolf; "and you will be glad to know that Mrs. Travers will be well cared for."

"Well'm," said the other, fanning herself vigorously, "you see she wasn't brought up in the profession as I was, and she always took things hard. Travers, her husband, was a capital comedy man, and I'm told it was a runaway match; but he got to drinking, and I think she led a hard life with him. She's one of those that couldn't get along even for herself; but she's as sweet and as good a creature as I ever knew. We're doing a good business now on the road, and so we thought it only fair poor Mollie should have something."

Nan brought in the tray of lemonade and cake herself, and timidly offered some to Mrs. Landor, who was much

pleased, and asked if this was the young lady little David talked of. Nan blushed with delight, and occupied the next few moments in critically examining every article of Mrs. Landor's dress, and every motion of her face or hands, in order to tell Joan what an actress *really* was like.

Before Mrs. Landor left, Miss Rolf asked her whether she would not like some flowers; and Nan conducted her into the beautiful garden, where she gathered a heaping basket of roses and heliotrope and other blossoms, to Mrs. Landor's great delight.

"Well," she said, standing in the garden and surveying the large handsome house among the trees—"well, I think Mollie Travers *has* found friends." A wistful look came into the good-hearted woman's face. "I wish my Janey were going to do half as well in life as I know David will now. Thank you, I'm sure," she added, as Nan laid one or two more exquisite "Jacque" roses in the basket. "I must say good-bye; and if our company comes this way at Christmas, perhaps we'll find Mrs. Travers well again."

Miss Rolf said she hoped, if the company did return, Mrs. Landor would call again; and so the good woman departed, well pleased by her visit.

That afternoon had been determined upon for the taking possession of the new rooms, and Mrs. Landor had no sooner departed than Phyllis and Joan and Lance appeared, to go

with Nan for the final survey and arrangements of the room. Phyllis came up the garden path with a funny little half-satirical smile just curving her lips.

"Who in the world was your strange visitor, Cousin Letty?" she inquired.

Miss Rolf was still standing on the steps where she had watched Nan gather the roses, and she looked a little disapprovingly upon pretty Phyllis.

"That was a very good-hearted friend of Mrs. Travers," she answered, "who brought a little purse she had made up among her associates for our poor friend."

Now there was one peculiarity about Aunt Letitia which appealed most strongly to Nan. She rarely used strong words of approval or condemnation, yet in all that she said it was not possible for a person, even of ordinary discernment, to mistake her meaning. Phyllis felt intuitively rebuked, and she hastened to change the subject. It was this young lady's inflexible rule never to annoy Cousin Letty.

Nan was quickly ready for their expedition, and walked along with Joan's hand in hers, eagerly detailing Mrs. Landon's visit.

"Oh!" said Joan, "how much harder I should have looked at her if I'd *only* known she was an actress!"

But, at all events, it was consoling to hear Nan's voluble description; and, as Joan remarked, *perhaps* she would come

again some day, when Nan promised immediately to send for Joan.

They found Mrs. Holt anxious to show them how well she had cleaned the rooms, and evidently eager to know what two or three large packages, which had come from Ames's, contained. These were opened in the little sitting-room, and disclosed a pair of pretty muslin curtains, some sofa cushions, and two sets of hanging book-shelves, with some cheap though well-colored blue Japanese china bowls, and a few ornaments of the blue-and-white Satsuma ware.

Nan had not been mistaken in relying upon Cousin Phyllis's exquisite taste, even in arranging the simplest things; and added to this was so much tact that she induced Mrs. Holt to put away the tawdry ornaments of the room without in the least affronting that good woman.

"My Mirandy made that," she said, dusting the glass shade of some hideous wax flowers, startling fuchsias and lilies of the valley, and big bursting white roses.

"Oh, then," said Phyllis, sweetly, "hadn't you rather put it away now, Mrs. Holt?" And so one such thing after another was disposed of, and then the little sitting-room, with its matted floor and clean walls and windows, the chintz-covered sofa and chairs, looked invitingly ready for their final touches. The book-shelves were hung at each side of the chimney-piece, and on the lower shelves they put some

of the Japanese ware, in which fresh flowers could be kept. Then the few pictures—good cuts from illustrated papers, and well framed in plain oak—were hung; the sofa cushions adjusted, and the curtains nicely draped and tied back with dark-red ribbons. The white marble centre-table was covered with an olive-green cloth, and on it arranged a lamp and a few books, and a lacquer box, in which were pens and pencils; while an inkstand and blotter were at one side. Nan surveyed the room with delight; and it certainly looked most inviting, though there was nothing in it or about it which suggested luxury. It was a simple abode; but everything was in good taste and refined.

In the widow's bedroom a few comforts for an invalid were placed—a low table which could be near her bed, a nice bath and a warm wool rug, with one or two cheerful pictures on the walls. David's little room beyond, they felt, they could leave more bare, since, as Nan said, "Boys are only *boys*." And Joan added, "And they never know *what* they have about them."

By three o'clock everything was ready: Flowers in the vases and bowls; the windows opened, but shaded; and Mrs. Holt was instructed to have a nice substantial tea ready when the mother and child arrived. And then Nan told Phyllis what Aunt Letty had suggested—that Mrs. Heriot and Love should bring them to Miller Street cottage.

“Aunt Letty says,” said Nan, “that they may feel shy if we are here.”

Phyllis quite agreed to this, but Joan felt as if she would like to have witnessed the Traverses taking possession of their new abode; and Nan had to make herself very consolatory on the subject all the way home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next few weeks passed very rapidly ; not alone had Nan to think of her charges in Miller Street, who were certainly thriving, but preparations for Phyllis's birthday were going on in a very elaborate and exciting manner. A great deal of secrecy was required in the doings at the carriage-house, where there were now daily rehearsals—Nan performing the part of the Captive, and Laura the Knight. There was some difficulty in making Dicksie, who was the Knight's intimate friend, conduct himself satisfactorily, as he was so exceedingly anxious to see and hear everything that was going on between his own parts that his curly head was constantly popping in ; and when on one occasion it was necessary for him to appear in disguise—wrapped in some thick cloak or muffling—he absolutely refused to put anything around him but an old Nottingham lace curtain, through which, of course, every line and feature were ridiculously apparent. Joan as the Magician was very terrible, especially when at one thrilling part she had to produce some music, which she did in a most flourishing manner on a comb. She

insisted upon Nan's telling her how Mrs. Landor had moved and walked, feeling sure she ought to get some "hints" for her own performance; and Nan went into wild fits of laughter over Joan's grimacings and dancings when the final discovery is made that the Captive is the Magician's dearly beloved niece.

There was some difficulty in managing for the appearance of the Captive's relations, when summoned by the Magician; but here the back window came into requisition — Lance offering, as he said, to "shove" them in. Bertie and Alfred represented these shadowy forms, and Lance made a framework on which some pink tarlatan was stretched, and behind which the Captive's relations looked a little more ghostly than they had during the first rehearsals; but it was certainly an anxious moment when the Magician said,

"Arise, spirits of the house of Gondulfo!" and a scrambling noise, suppressed laughter, and labored breathing were heard outside, with such whispered remarks as "I say, Lance, you're pinching me!" and "Oh-o-o, that's too tight!" and a very heated and panting personage would half tumble into the little space between the curtain and the pink tarlatan screen, while the Magician, with his back to the audience, played wildly on his comb, and the Captive seemed in a half-fainting condition. However, the children derived days of enjoyment from the rehearsals; and when Phyllis's

birthday dawned, their condition of anxiety and excitement was scarcely less than if they were to appear before a genuine audience.

Lance wrote out formal invitations to Miss Rolf and Miss Prior (who highly disapproved of the whole thing), to Mrs. Heriot and Mrs. Travers, and David and the Blakes. Besides their home party half a dozen young friends were invited; and the morning of the performance was spent in decorating the carriage-house with boughs and trailing vines. Lance and Nan had contrived to make a very pretty banner, with Phyllis's name on it, which they hung directly above the stage.

"I say, Lance," said Dicksie, as if a wonderfully happy thought had occurred to him, "let's put on it 'In memory of her *thirteenth birthday*!'"

"Hold your little tongue," laughed Lance, from the top of the step-ladder. "Fancy Phyl's look on reading such a thing. Come here, Laura, will you, one moment?"

Laura was in the little dressing-room they had contrived at one side, and Lance, from his perch among the greens, could look directly down upon her. Nan, at his side, could do the same, and for some reason she could not define a strange feeling—like distrust—swept across Nan's mind.

Laura was on her knees under one of the little windows; before her, on a chair, was the looking-glass which they had

borrowed from one of the bedrooms, and she was trying the effect of various glittering ornaments on the helmet she was to wear as the Knight.

They were cheap things; yet it was strange, when every detail of their costumes had been so openly discussed, that Laura should feel it necessary to go off by herself with something new to decide upon. The ornaments were lying in an open paper on her lap. Nan never forgot just what they looked like.

Laura started, and looked around up through the aperture where now only Nan's wistful face was discernible, Lance being occupied with some critical piece of his work. Laura colored scarlet and jumped up, wrapping the paper jealously around the trinkets, and putting them with rather a defiant air into her pocket.

"Lance wants you," said Nan, wondering why her own voice sounded so low and constrained.

Laura came out very quickly, and busied herself for a few moments with handing Lance what he wanted. When Nan descended from the ladder, she said, carelessly,

"I was just seeing how some things I got—at—school would look on my helmet."

"Why," said Nan, "school is over, I thought."

"Well, *school-girls* aren't!" exclaimed Laura, positively angry. "I meant—the girls—"



LAURA TRYING THE NEW ORNAMENTS ON HER HELMET.

Nan could not possibly have told why an atmosphere that was curious and painful seemed to hang about the rest of that morning. Not all of Lance's fun, nor Joan's grimacing and dancing could dispel it; and she was much relieved when Lance proposed her walking with him down to the Blakes. He said he was afraid "Love" would be too shy to come, and they had better go and urge it.

"Oh, no," said Nan, quickly, "Love isn't like that, Lance—she is shy, but it isn't just that way; she and I have long talks, and she only gets shy sometimes when she is giving me her advice about anything."

Still Lance insisted upon the walk; and when they were well on their way, going along the river bank leading to the boat-house, he stopped suddenly and said,

"Nan, I feel lately as if something queer had come over Laura. Can you think what it is?"

Nan felt more strongly than anything else a desire to do Laura the very fullest justice, and she went too far in saying:

"Oh, Lance, what *could* there be? You know Phyllis has lately had to send for Dr. Rogers for her. She seems to be running down, he said."

Lance put his lips together and drew up his eyebrows in the way Nan had learned to know meant annoyance or perplexity with him.

"It isn't *that*," he said, shortly; and Nan was relieved to find he let the subject drop.

The cousins found Love with her sleeves rolled up, and her plump hands busy making cake. They went around by the side door, and Love nodded to them brightly through the vines across her kitchen window. How cool and sweet and bright it all looked, was what both Lance and Nan thought; and Love, in her clean gingham dress with a dainty apron, was the personification of what you would call a "nice" little maiden.

She was evidently pleased by their coming, and promised not to fail in her attendance at the play with Mrs. Travers and little David. Lance wanted to linger for a chat with old Blake, but Nan hurried him back; not before Love had whispered, "I'm going to wear my silk dress!"

"Oh, Lance!" exclaimed Nan, with glowing eyes, as they left the cottage; "isn't it worth *anything* to be able to make people happy as Aunt Letty can with her money? How *can* rich people ever keep their money to themselves!"

Lance did not tell his little cousin, but he had begun to learn a great many lessons from her.

What Lance had said of Laura took deeper root in Nan's mind than she would have allowed. It was eleven o'clock when they got back to College Street, and her first thought was to see Laura; but she was up-stairs, Joan said, from be-

hind the scenes, and on going to her door Nan found it locked.

A cold lunch was prepared for the children, and Phyllis begged of them to eat it promptly.

"Now, Nan—Lance—Dicksie," she called out from the second landing on the stairs, "do come down; because remember all there is to be done to-day and this evening besides." For in the evening Phyllis was to have a "grown-up" party, at which the children had, one and all, permission to assist.

Down scurried the children, full of delightful excitement, even Laura looking a little brighter as they assembled in the dining-room where Phyllis, never to be flurried or put out of temper, quietly dispensed bread and butter and cakes and cold meat.

After this came the rush to the carriage-house, the doors of which were now resplendent with large sheets of paper bearing in red paint the following words:

THE CAPTIVE AND THE KNIGHT

A MAGICAL PLAY

IN TWO ACTS

BY MISS LAURA ROLF

IN HONOR OF

THE BIRTHDAY OF

MISS PHYLLIS ROLF

AT

2 O'Clock.

Several of the young invited guests had gathered about the carriage-house, and watched with interest the rush of the performers towards it. Laura was in a mood of evident excitement, and hurried into the dressing-room, taking up her costume of paper muslin and silver paper, here and there fastening upon it some little dangling bits of tinsel which—how, she could not afterwards tell—impressed themselves in color and shape upon Nan's mind.

The barn-doors were flung open at the appointed time; the guests were assembled in a few moments, and the play began.

Joan was quite the success of the piece; Laura was too conscious; Nan too much given to bursts of laughter quite out of keeping with a Princess in captivity; and the usual scimmages took place with the spirits of the Princess's relations. One horrible moment occurred when Bertie, being flung too violently into the window, upset the pink screen, and called out—

“There, Lance, I *told* you I would!” This produced a laugh, of course, but it was quelled by a most awful look from Joan, who, as the Magician, had painted her face in a way which made her expression very unpleasant, and certainly she had the desired effect upon the laughing audience when she turned it towards them.

The play ended, the children who had looked on re-

mained outside waiting for the Rolfs to appear. Nan dashed into the dressing-room to enjoy a good laugh, where she found Laura hastily putting away the ornaments which had decked her helmet and flowing cloak.

“Oh—why do you take them off?” exclaimed Nan.

“Because I *want* to!” snapped Laura. She was dressed first and hurried out. Nan was just folding up the last of her stage finery when she saw one of Laura’s ornaments on the floor. She picked it up, thinking how vexed her cousin would be to lose even one of the pretty things; but when she went out into the barn Laura had vanished. Nan put it into her pocket until she should find her cousin; but an hour later had forgotten all about it. How much reason she had to regret it later!

CHAPTER XXIV.

“DOES it rain here often in the autumn?”

It was Nan who asked the question as she sat perched in the window of Mrs. Heriot's store-room, while that good woman was busy bottling the last of her preserves. The store-room was hardly on a lower floor than the dining-room and black-walnut parlor; that is to say, it opened off a little corridor reached by a descent of only three steps, and Nan was always ready to spend an hour there with Mrs. Heriot or Susan, for there was a peculiar fascination about the shelves, and the big, deep window with its little flap of curtain, and the space between the cupboards, where were a large, low table and two big, old-fashioned chairs. Sometimes Nan had helped Mrs. Heriot pare apples or peaches there, and one delightful day she and Joan had helped label preserve-jars and stick cloves into the pickled pears. In these last they had made various initials with the cloves, intending to keep a keen eye open all winter for their reappearance.

“Does it rain often?” rejoined Mrs. Heriot, looking up

absent-mindedly from her work. "Well, I don't know what you'd call *often*. Where I came from in England we thought nothing of ten days' rain together; but then—don't bother, child!—Christmas will bring you a good frost and maybe some skating."

"Oh, Christmas!" exclaimed Nan. She rubbed a clear place on the window-pane and looked out. Everywhere the lawns and garden-beds were drenched, and there was a melancholy sound in the half-leafless trees. Yet Nan felt very happy. She had so much to fill her life nowadays that even rainy days were pleasant. It was assuredly a cause of regret that Lance had been sent to school in Paris, and Nan had to feel sorry that Laura was not well; but Laura had never been her playfellow, and, besides, of late she had been more than ever distant; Joan remained the happy, brisk, loving Joan of the spring and summer time; and, best of all, she had succeeded admirably with her charges, Mrs. Travers and little David. Every week the accounts were satisfactory. Even Miss Prior was beginning to look kindly upon it, and so pleased was Aunt Letty that there was talk of Nan's doing something more extensive next year. Phyllis was no longer supercilious about it, or, at least, she only smiled in her peculiar way once in a while; and Nan had grown to be really good friends with Love Blake, all through that first meeting. Love had given her

the soundest kind of counsel, encouraged her when she felt sad, and even helped her in purchases. Now, Nan knew that to her cousin Phyllis Rolf the boatman's daughter seemed a very ordinary person, yet Nan felt a clinging to her friendship with her, and Miss Rolf had never interfered. She had never murmured, like Phyllis, that it was a *common taste*; and Nan felt that little Love, with her quiet, peaceful eyes, and her ready, unselfish heart, could teach her many very noble lessons.

"There is Susan calling," said Nan, suddenly. Mrs. Heriot put her pickle-jar down and listened, and at that moment Susan appeared, quite breathless, in the doorway.

"Oh, Miss Annice!" she said, "it's your aunt's carriage come for you. She's in College Street, and you are to go at once, if you please, miss."

Nan sprang down from her perch. She could not have said why, yet an undefined dread took sudden possession of her. What did it mean? She knew Miss Rolf had gone out shopping; but why should she have sent for her to come to College Street?

"Is Laura ill?" asked Nan, trembling, as she hurried upstairs to put on her things. But no one seemed able to answer. It was the only emergency she could think of; for of all the College Street cousins Laura was the only sickly one.

Nan hardly knew—long afterwards it was difficult to remember—just how she got into the carriage, and, with that nameless dread upon her, was driven down the familiar streets. It was fast growing dark, and the wet pavements shone under the street lamps. The little girl in the carriage strained her gaze against the window-pane, looking out eagerly for the iron gateway and the galleried wing of the pleasant house. But everything was curiously quiet as she went in, and, according to custom, Nan ran up-stairs to lay off her things in Joan's room. After all, there was nothing so remarkable in being sent for to a house which she was in and out of every other day. Nan smiled at her own fears as she pushed open the door of the girls' room.

The darkness was not absolute here. Nan could see a figure on the bed; and Laura's face, white and haggard, started up from the pillows. On seeing Nan she gave a little shudder, buried her face again, and then looked up with a strained, feverish gaze.

All Nan's tender heart was filled with pity. "Oh, Laura, darling," she said, hastening to the side of the little bed, "what is it—are you worse?"

But Laura shrank back a moment, and then said, in a hoarse voice, entirely unlike her own, "Nan! Nan! listen to me: *if you tell of me you will kill me!*"

"What, *I* tell of you!" exclaimed Nan. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, oh!" moaned Laura, moving restlessly about in the bed. "I am so ill, what can I do? Go down-stairs, Nan—you will hear—go down."

Wonderingly, Nan laid aside her hat and jacket and went down the stairs. Midway she met Phyllis, who stopped and looked at her very strangely. There was only the light of the hall-lamp on the faces of the two consins, but it showed Phyllis's full of pain and anxiety, and Nan's fearless, sweet glance raised to hers, now only touched by something wondering and perplexed.

Phyllis gazed earnestly a moment, and then said, "Go to Aunt Letty in the study, Nan." She added, in an instant, "I know you will make it all right."

"*What—?*" asked bewildered little Nan; but Phyllis passed swiftly on, and Nan had nothing to do but to seek Aunt Letty in the small library, known as the study. When she opened the door of that room it was a relief to find Miss Rolf seated in the window, alone.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISS ROLF made a quick movement as Nan shut the door quietly after her, and as the little girl stood still, hesitatingly, in the twilight, she exclaimed:

"Come here, Annice, there is something I want you to explain at once—come, come."

Miss Rolf seemed feverishly impatient, and unlike herself. Nan saw in her hands a long bill headed by Ames's mark and address.

"I have got in the account," Miss Rolf continued. "There are things here—oh, Annice!" the old lady exclaimed, piteously, "if you wanted anything—a new sash, or even those tinsel things, or lace collarettes—*why* didn't you tell me! It would have been *so* much better than to buy them in secret."

"*I!*" Nan gasped out the word. She was more bewildered than ever.

"Look!" exclaimed Miss Rolf again, imperiously. "Read this." And she pushed the long bill towards the child.

Nan mechanically took it in her hands and began reading

as well as she could. Scattered among the articles she had purchased for the Traverses were various others, unknown to her—pink sash-ribbon, lace collarettes, collars, cuffs, tinsel ornaments, beads—the number and the strangeness of it bewildered poor Nan, while her aunt threateningly stood over her. Suddenly, like an awful shock, as it were from the very heavens, it flashed over her: *She had seen these very things in Laura's possession!*

What it all meant Nan could not even then tell, but, coupled with Laura's wild supplications "not to tell of her," she felt there was guilt somewhere, and that not her own. Nan was too young to be entirely self-possessed or equal to knowing what to do. The paper shook in her hands. What *could* she do or say? Little by little occasions came back to her mind when she had seen Laura quickly hiding these things. And the tinsel ornaments! How clearly Nan now understood what Laura's anxiety to hide them *after* the play had meant!

For Nan those moments were horrible. What could she do? It was not in her heart or nature suddenly to speak and condemn her cousin. But there was Aunt Letty waiting, with her features all drawn and haggard, all too anxious to restore Nan to favor, yet evidently thinking the worst.

"Oh!" cried Nan, suddenly, looking up wildly at her aunt,

"please—let me wait a moment; give me a few moments and I can tell you."

She flung down the paper and started up the stairs to Laura's room. It was dark, and yet she could see the white face on the pillow, and hear Laura moan. She flung herself down beside the bed, whispering, "Oh, Laura, I must tell, you know—you know! Oh, let me tell them!"—her voice broke down in sobs.

"You shall not!" whispered Laura back. "You will kill me if you do. Wait a little while. You *must* not!"

Laura really grew faint, and Nan looked at her, half in pity, half in contempt.

"And you will not own to it?" Nan asked, slowly.

But Laura only buried her face and sobbed convulsively. Had not Phyllis appeared Nan would have said more; but on seeing her older cousin the little girl turned and left the room, returning to the study. What was there for her to do or to say? She could not tell. How could she blame Laura? how stand up and disgrace her cousin—Phyllis's sister?—and even were she to do so, would she be believed? And Laura really ill, worn out, Nan did not now doubt, by her wretched secret.

Everything seemed to be in a whirl about her as she re-entered the study, where Miss Rolf still stood as she had left her.

"Well?" The old lady spoke sharply.

But Nan, for the first time, only hung her head.

"Explain this, Annice," her aunt said, coldly.

Nan tried to find her voice, and failed. Then she said, slowly, "I cannot."

"Is it that you *will* not?" demanded her aunt.

No answer.

"Annice, did you hear me?"

"Yes, Aunt Letty."

"And can you not answer?"

"No."

Nan's voice sounded even to herself a far-away whisper. There was silence for a moment—silence, at least, in the little room. Outside the rain beat furiously, and for a long time Annice Rolf never heard the same sound without a recollection of the faint, sick feeling that possessed her, as she stood with bowed head before her aunt.

"You may go," said Miss Rolf, presently. "Go home at once in the carriage, and send it back for me. And go at once to your room. Do you hear, Annice? Go at once."

It seemed like a dream to Nan—her going up the stairs, knocking at Laura's door, and mechanically asking Phyllis for her things. How she put them on; how she got into the carriage and gave her aunt's orders; how she drove home through the dark, wet streets, and reached the house and

her own little room—seemed afterwards all recollections in the mists of a nightmare. But there she was at last, in the window of her room, and crying as if her heart would break. Oh, for one word with Lance, or Love Blake! And if Laura should never tell! And in the midst of all, and, I rejoice to say, the very worst of all seemed to Nan to lie in the fact of Laura's double deceit. What *could* have induced her to it? Wayward, thoughtless, forgetful as was Nan, her conscience was unstained by any actual sin, and not for worlds could she have been tempted to a lie.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It seemed to Nan hours afterwards that she heard her aunt's step along the corridor pause a moment near her door, and go on to her own room. The door closed; the house was still. Nan crept wretchedly into bed, and cried herself to sleep. There was no one to advise her, and she could only pray in an agonized, dumb sort of way; but God can hear thoughts as well as words, and it had comforted her that she had asked his help. To Nan it seemed as if black despair would settle upon her, for she gradually induced herself to believe that it would be cruelly wrong to "tell of" Laura. Surely, some day they would know the rights of it; but meanwhile, how was she to endure her life? All her former loneliness returned upon her. She lay there in the bed, feeling as forlorn as the first night of her arrival, and she would have given all she hoped to own to disentangle this mystery; for, in one sense, mystery it was. How and why had Laura contrived to put those things on her bill? Nan's brain—exhausted from bewilderment, and at best only a little fourteen-year-old brain—refused to solve the question.

She awoke to find her room full of sunlight, and Mrs. Heriot standing over her with a grieved face.

Nan raised her head; the tears of the night still stained her cheeks, and there were signs of weeping in good Mrs. Heriot's eyes as well.

"My child," she said, tenderly, "whatever has happened? Miss Rolf doesn't want to tell me, but it's something you won't own to her; now do it—do it, dear, I say."

Nan looked up wistfully.

"*I cannot*," was all she could say.

Mrs. Heriot turned away to the window with a sigh.

Nan lay still, trying to think what to do; but now there was only one idea predominating. She must guard Laura's secret until *she* chose to tell it. Had Nan been wiser or older, she would at once have taken her aunt into her full confidence, well knowing that so true and kind a nature as Miss Rolf's would never deal unjustly; but then, all Nan felt was that a sense of *honor* demanded her silence.

"Then I'm afraid," said Mrs. Heriot, turning from the window, "you'll not see your aunt the day. I was to come and ask you. Am I to just tell her you *cannot*?"

Nan tearfully nodded, and slowly Mrs. Heriot left the room. When she returned, Nan was sitting, dressed, in the window.

“You’re to go to breakfast,” said Mrs. Heriot. “But your aunt says you’re not to speak to her.”

What a meal it was! It seemed to choke poor Nan, who gladly escaped even to Miss Prior, and for the first time she plunged ardently into her lessons; but Miss Prior did not believe in praise, so she gave none, only Nan’s unusual zeal made the study-hours more tranquil. Miss Rolf did not appear at dinner nor at tea. The intervening time Nan passed miserably in her own room. After tea she was sent for to the black-walnut parlor, where she found her aunt at her desk.

“Nan,” she said, very gravely, “I wish to tell you that—making no remark about what I must say I consider your *dishonest* conduct—I paid the bill at Ames’s. This, I hope, will lead you to a candid and full confession to me. You must know that the credit was *only* given for articles to be bought by you for the Traverses. In looking over your clothes—your summer clothes—to-day, I found this in one of your pockets.” Nan started as her aunt held up the little tinsel ornament she remembered having picked up that day long ago in the carriage-house. “Of course,” continued Miss Rolf, “this only confirmed what your silence indicated.”

There was a long pause, during which a sound of sobbing rose in Nan’s throat.

"HER AUNT HELD UP THE LITTLE TINSEL ORNAMENT."





"Have you nothing to say, Annice?" asked her aunt, very sadly.

But Nan could only shake her head, and say "No."

"Will you tell me nothing of it?"

"I cannot," again said Nan.

"Go," answered her aunt, standing up quickly. "Go! It is a terrible blow to me, child, to be so disappointed in you."

Nan turned, and fled along the hall up to her own room. It seemed to her as if some strong decision had been made by Miss Rolf as she spoke the last words, and so the next morning proved. Mrs. Heriot came to her while she was at her lessons, and called her into the hall. Then she said, in a quiet voice, which Nan did not know was full of half-suppressed tears,

"My dear, you're to go back to Bromfield. There—don't be so startled. Your aunt means to pay your board and have you taught; but you're to go to-morrow."

Poor little Nan! What could she do or say? She did not see her aunt again. Through Mrs. Heriot she begged to see Joan, or Mrs. Travers and David, but this was denied her; and on the next morning, while she was again sitting forlornly in her room, Mrs. Heriot brought her the following note, written in Miss Rolf's delicate, old-fashioned hand:

"I cannot trust myself to see you, my child. It would grieve me too much. I am sending you back to Bromfield, where your board will be paid and a suitable sum allowed for your schooling and clothing. I do not think it wise for you to go to a school while you have your present ideas of honor. Do all you can to improve your mind; and, above all, pray to God to spare you further wrong-doing. Your step-aunt, Mrs. Rupert, is expecting you. She knows nothing of what you have done."

Nan read the letter in a dazed, stupefied way, sitting in the window of her once homelike room; but now all seemed curiously changed. Was that the same garden she had looked at the other day? Were these her clothes lying about, which Mrs. Heriot was silently folding and packing? It was a strange morning in Nan's life; but when, later in the day, she found herself being driven away from Rolf House with Mrs. Heriot, all her repressed feelings gave way. She flung herself upon the good woman's shoulder and burst into tears. Not one good-bye even! Not one parting glimpse of Joan's kindly little face! Not one word with David and Mrs. Travers! Oh, it seemed a cruel ending of her beautiful, happy life!

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVENING usually found Mrs. Rupert very tired and rather cross. On days that trade was not brisk she was apt to be particularly acid in her manner, and on this October evening things were in a very unpleasant "condition of working," as she called them. To begin with, Marian had gone to spend the day with a friend, and had not returned. Mary and Georgie, the two younger children, had been very troublesome going to bed, and, to crown everything, the gas would not light, so that Mrs. Rupert had been compelled to run out herself for oil and get ready two lamps—one for the store and one for the parlor.

Nan was expected back. Mrs. Rupert, as she poked the miserable little fire in the sitting-room, wondered *why* this rearrangement had been made. It was a great consideration, of course, to have her board paid; but why, if her aunt had intended to make her her heiress, should she be returned to Bromfield?

"I know how it will end," thought Mrs. Rupert, nodding her head sagely; "the old lady'll die and leave her *quite* on my hands again."

It was only five o'clock, but dark as any winter evening; and as the carriage from the station, containing Nan and Mrs. Heriot, drove to the door, the little house and store looked dismal enough.

"Eh! my, is this the place?" ejaculated Mrs. Heriot.

Nan could not answer—her heart was too full. She followed Mrs. Heriot out of the carriage, and showed her the way to the house-door, which was speedily opened upon Mrs. Rupert's portly figure and large face.

"Well, Nan Rolf!" was her greeting. A stare at Mrs. Heriot was followed by "And who is this, may I ask?"

"My name is Heriot, ma'am," was the very bland answer; "I was sent by Miss Rolf here with Miss Annice. And now, my dear," she added, standing inside the dingy hallway for a moment only, "I think I'll just leave you and go. Good-bye, love"—with a hearty kiss which Nan passionately returned; "do you mind and write to your aunt soon." And almost before Nan knew how it was done, the door had closed, and she was alone with her step-aunt.

Mrs. Rupert led the way up the well-known stairs and into the sitting-room, which it seemed to Nan she must have left ages ago, instead of only six months since. How dingy and disorderly it looked after the quiet neatness and comfort of Rolf House! The fact of Mrs. Rupert's trade and moderate circumstances was not the excuse for this.

Nan knew better now. Was not Mr. Blake far poorer, and only a boatman? and yet how dainty and sweet were all of Love's surroundings. No, this was all due to the nature of Mrs. Rupert herself, and Nan had seen enough of the world to appreciate this keenly.

"Well," said Mrs. Rupert, setting the lamp down on the table, "I don't suppose you expected to be back from your fine relations so soon, Miss Nan—did you? I'm sure I don't think the board she's to pay is so much."

"Oh, aunt!" cried poor Nan, blushing, "don't—please don't speak of that—I'll work; I'll do what I can."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Mrs. Rupert, turning around, with a laugh. "Well, we'll see. Now, I suppose you want some supper."

In spite of her woes, Nan was hungry, and was very honestly glad of the plate of hot sausages and potatoes and the pie Mrs. Rupert placed before her. Her step-aunt plied her with questions about her life at Rolf House, all of which she answered so listlessly that at last Mrs. Rupert jumped up, exclaiming:

"Well, I d'know as I *ever* took much stock in those people. Make up your mind they've thrown you off once and for all. And, Nan, see here: I don't believe as you'll get more than a year's board and schooling out of them; and I've made *my* mind up as you'd oughter learn some trade.

I can't keep you, and there's nothing else for you to do, as I can see."

Poor Nan! It struck her only too forcibly that this might be the case, and she spent a wretched and, if the truth must be told, rather a rebellious evening, considering her future. One comforting feature was in her new life at Bromfield: she had a room to herself. It was only one of the attic rooms, bare and miserably gloomy, but it was all her own. There she felt she could sometimes be free from intrusion. It would be a place to think of Lance and Joan in; perhaps a place to cry in.

She helped Mrs. Rupert up-stairs with her trunk, and before she went to bed unpacked her little belongings, trying to arrange them with Rolf House precision in the small bureau and cupboard. Oh, for one hour in Beverley! When her aunt left her, Nan pressed her face against the window looking out on the weedy, dank garden, and felt as if her heart would break. Much as she desired to be alone, it was a relief to hear Marian's high-pitched voice, about eight o'clock, when that young person burst into the room.

"Well, Nan!" she exclaimed, kissing her rather boisterously; "I do declare, who'd have ever expected *you* back?" Nan tried to laugh. "I hope you're not sorry, Marian," she said, quietly.

"Oh, no; I don't suppose I am," rejoined her cousin, "unless you're too fine a lady to suit our ways."

"I don't think I'm a fine lady," said Nan, laughing.

Marian sat down on the little bed, and stared some time at Nan.

"Well, you're changed some," she remarked, finally; and then, standing up and giving her dress various little *perks*, she continued, "Do you think *I'm* changed?"

"Yes," said Nan, very honestly.

In the six months Marian had developed into what she considered constituted a "young lady." She was only fifteen, but she had left school, was in a dressmaking establishment, and had acquired all the most pernicious airs and graces of her companions. She wore the latest fashions in cheap imitations; had "banged" her pretty blonde hair so low over her eyes that every bit of the smooth, white brow was concealed; screwed in her waist until her shoulders and hips looked like caricatures, and wore a great deal of tawdry lace, cheap jet, and imitation jewelry. Marian had always been a pretty girl, and, but for her vulgarity and false taste in dress, would have been prettier than ever—but Nan, looking at her, wondered what Love Blake would say to her! Love, with her pretty brown silk, so simply made, her snowy collars and cuffs, her smooth, untortured brow.

"The girls at our place are awfully stylish," Marian said, evidently thinking she had made a profound impression upon her cousin, "and we have to dress a great deal, I can tell you. Well, good-night, Nan! Dear, what a sober face you have!"

And Marian, laughing loudly, ran out of the room and down the stairs, humming bits of "Champagne Charlie," a song just then coming into vogue.

"What would her life here be?" Nan questioned herself, lying in the dark, long after the house was still. She had not known until now how much the quiet, refined associations of her life in Beverley had done for her. Now, all that she had seen jarred upon every nerve. And was it just? Then there came into Nan's mind the words of a little hymn Love was fond of singing—

"God's time for waiting
Shall be mine."

"Oh, *can* it be?" thought poor little Nan, closing her eyes tightly; but the words were like a prayer, and she tried with honesty to repeat "Shall be mine."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PHILIP'S absence from home was an unexpected disappointment to Nan; but the reason gave her some comfort. It appeared that he had developed a decided talent for painting, and so had been sent abroad by the same gentleman who was paying all his expenses.

"I declare," said Mrs. Rupert, as she and Nan were at work the next morning in the kitchen, "it's wonderful the fancy that Mr. Field's took to Philip. Just saw him a few times, and put him to Barnabas; and now sent him abroad. He says he'll do well. Now Marian, *she's* doing splendid, if only they don't turn her head with compliments. She's so good-looking and so stylish."

Nan listened, thinking more of Philip than of Marian. She wondered if he would ever do anything, or *seem* to do anything, to cause Mr. Field to send him home in disgrace. She hoped no such fate would befall him.

"Now, Nan, work smart," called out Mrs. Rupert, "your teacher'll be here soon." And Nan hurried with the breakfast dishes, so that she was ready for her new teacher by nine o'clock.

Miss Rolf evidently had employed some one to engage this governess—a gentle, quiet-looking lady about thirty years of age, who began the lessons without any questions as to Nan's recent life. Altogether, the morning was not unhappy, except that Nan had grown so painfully conscious of the dust and disorder about her that she watched Mrs. Leigh's glance every time it rested on any one object, feeling a deep sense of mortification.

But good came of this. Nan felt certain she might make something of the room; for her ideas had developed greatly since she left Bromfield as to household matters. Accordingly, to Mrs. Rupert's great surprise, she asked permission to have the sitting-room to herself for an hour before the children returned from school; and it was wonderful what she contrived to do. Soap and water, dusters, and a broom made the place seem entirely different. And then Nan begged to be allowed to hunt in the attic for some bits of carpet. These she managed to sew in patches under the ragged places, and after mending a few tears in the curtains she felt quite triumphant. It mattered somewhat, however, that Mrs. Rupert and Marian laughed at her, and that the children coming home created fresh disorder; but still she felt conscious of well-doing.

When, after dinner, Nan carried her books up-stairs to her little attic room, she was cheered by a feeling that, in spite

of the misery of her false position, she could do something. She would set herself to make the shabby house brighter and cleaner, and more homelike. After a time Mrs. Rupert and Marian would feel differently about her motives in so doing.

No one must suppose that Nan worked wonders suddenly, nor that she grew very happy in doing her little work. On the contrary, it was a tedious process all around. It was hard to keep any place tidy or even tolerably comfortable. And her heart ached for news of Beverley. Miss Rolf wrote, but only to send her board and the money needful for her expenses; and as October and November dragged by Nan's loneliness increased. Nothing could have been much more comfortless as a home than the Rupert household; and Nan used to think the "waiting-time" was more than she could bear.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PHYLLIS, only, knew the reason why Miss Rolf had sent Nan to Bromfield; and, as the winter wore on, it puzzled and perplexed her more and more. She had seen a great many evidences of what she considered a "common taste" in Nan, but never one atom of anything like untruthfulness or dishonesty. She often recalled the glance of perfectly fearless innocence which Nan had given her that very night on the stairs; and with this it seemed harder than ever to believe her guilty of deceit. But then Phyllis often wound up such reflections by saying to herself, "It is the streak of common blood in her veins, I suppose; it must come out somewhere."

If Phyllis was unhappy, Miss Rolf was doubly so. She felt a strong purpose taken right out of her life, and it was hardening her into the cold, reserved woman she had been so long before Nan crept into her heart.

One afternoon, shortly before Christmas, Phyllis was sitting alone in her own room by the fire, busily working on some present for the approaching festivity, when she heard

some one in the adjoining room, sobbing. It was Joan, who appeared with a piece of crumpled paper in her hands, exclaiming, "Oh, Phyl, this makes me *so* unhappy! See, this is our compact of eternal friendship—Nan's and mine—and it's as bad as telling a lie never to write to her!"

Joan held out the little paper she and Nan had written that May afternoon so long ago; and, as Phyllis read it, the words so innocently written, "*God bless this!*" woke new belief in the child's honesty. Phyllis comforted Joan, all the time revolving the question in her mind, and was suddenly startled by hearing Joan say,

"Where has Laura gone, do you know? and may I have this to make Nan a Christmas present?"

She held up a piece of pink satin, from which some bits had been cut, and a yard or two of Valenciennes lace.

"Where did you get that, Joan?" exclaimed Phyllis.

"In the other room," explained the tearful Joan, "in a little broken box on the floor."

Phyllis made no answer; she arose and went into the next room, closing the door after her. It was a room rarely used; but since Laura had been so delicate she had often slept there to be near Phyllis, and used it in the daytime to sit in, so that her things were often about. The box of which Joan spoke lay half in, half out, of the flounce of the chintz lounge. Phyllis drew it out with trembling hands.

There was no mistaking its contents. They were certainly, in part, the articles charged to Nan at Ames's store.

Phyllis hardly knew what to think. All that she could feel sure of was, that Laura was involved in the affair; but how far she could not tell. One thing, she knew, must be done at once—that was, to find Laura and make her explain it.

Poor Phyllis! Pride had always been her strongest point; and belief in the uprightness of the children she had in reality brought up was almost a sacred thing to her. How could she face Miss Rolf and say, "It is *my* little sister who has, at least, been involved in this; not only poor Nan, whom we pitied because she had been badly brought up?" And then there flashed upon Phyllis a sickening feeling lest, through Laura, gross injustice had been done poor Nan.

"Joan," she said, looking in upon her little sister, "if Laura has gone out it must have been to Rolf House, as she never goes anywhere else. I'm going there at once—and don't let them wait tea for me. I'll be back as early as I can."

Whatever Phyllis's faults, her sense of what was justly due under such circumstances was keen and pure. Though feeling half ill with dread of what she might discover, she put on her things and walked quickly up College Street to Rolf House. Her first inquiry was if Laura were there; and

“ THIS IS OUR COMPACT OF ETERNAL FRIENDSHIP—NAN’S AND MINE.”



the answer, "Yes, miss, she is reading in the library," sent a new flutter to her heart. But she walked straight into the room where Laura, looking very white and languid, was lounging with a book before the fire.

"Laura," the older sister said, going up to the little girl and kneeling down beside her, "I want you to tell me at once, dear, how you came by all those things Nan was supposed to have bought at Ames's."

Laura stared a moment, and then burst into tears; but to Phyllis's amazement it seemed a *relieved* sort of weeping. She rocked back and forth a moment, and then exclaimed between her sobs,

"Oh, Phyl—Phyl—have you found out? I'm so glad! I've come here day after day trying to confess it. Oh, I know how bad I am—and Nan is so good!"

Phyllis knelt very still by her little sister a moment, trying to know what to do or say. *Moral* emergencies, somehow, always baffled her. She could reprove and advise judiciously on most matters, but to know how to lead a heart stricken with remorse—a conscience ashamed of what it held—was beyond her. After a moment she said, in a low voice,

"Lollie, try and tell me all about it."

And then the miserable story came out. The girls at school, Laura said, were in the habit of wearing so many

little bits of finery, such as she never possessed; and one day, having saved her pocket-money for a special ribbon, she went into Ames's and bought it. Just as she was about to pay for it, the clerk said, "Aren't you Miss Rolf's niece, who has things charged to her?"

Poor Laura! it was the first moment of temptation. She answered yes; had the ribbon charged, meaning to pay for it later, as in her ignorance of such matters she believed she could; and then, little by little, the fascination for buying, "like the other girls," grew upon her, and she kept hoping always to save money before the end of the year to pay it up, believing the bill would not be presented until January. It was, indeed, only by a chance that Miss Rolf had asked for it earlier. Then had come a desperate fit of terror, and, believing Nan would be forgiven, she had meanly kept silence. What followed, Phyllis knew. Certainly, Laura told the whole story now unreservedly.

It seemed to Phyllis in that hour as though something in her very heart gave way. Nan, for whom they had all secretly entertained a feeling that she was not their equal — Nan had shown herself the bravest and most upright of all.

"Laura," said poor Phyllis, "you must tell Cousin Letty." Laura gave a gasp, and put out a detaining hand as Phyllis was moving. "I will go first, and speak to her about it;

but she must know at once. There must not be a moment lost."

Laura sobbed more violently than ever; and Phyllis went away and across to the black-walnut parlor, where she was tolerably sure to find her cousin.

There the old lady was seated, with listlessly folded hands, in the window where Nan had made out her accounts that first evening. She was looking across the wintry garden-beds, and thinking of the lost child who had been so dear to her—who had come in her lonely old age, to open the secret springs of love in her heart.

Phyllis had a choking feeling in her throat as she went in, and for a moment she could hardly speak. But nothing could have been better than her first words:

"Oh, Cousin Letitia, I know all about it! Nan—Nan is perfectly innocent! She never deceived you, except that she did not tell what she knew of others."

CHAPTER XXX.

I CAN hardly describe Nan's state of mind as Christmas drew near. Bromfield began early to show signs of the approaching festivity; and as Nan walked about the snowy streets—often just for the sake of turning her mind from sad thoughts—the gayety of the shop-windows, the blithe air of the passers-by, all jarred upon her painfully.

Mrs. Rupert had begun to treat her niece very coldly. More and more was she certain that Nan's "folks" at Beverley meant gradually to cast her off, so she insisted on Nan's making herself useful in every way; and the child rose early and worked late in order to accomplish all that was required of her. But occupation, she knew, was better than sitting idle with her thoughts; only sometimes Nan's head ached painfully over her sums, and often kind-hearted Mrs. Leigh had to excuse her from her lessons entirely.

The Ruperts began to feel the effect of Nan's efforts at tidiness in the house. She had rummaged out some bits of curtaining—old muslin—but when washed and starched it looked very well; and, by dint of close saving, she had

contrived to have the furniture mended, a new cover put on the mantel-board, and chintz slips on the easy-chairs. Mrs. Rupert was willing enough to accept Nan's labors so long as they did not interfere with what *she* needed her to do; and Marian seemed better pleased to bring her young friends home with her, now that the sitting-room had an air of cleanliness and something like comfort.

It was the twentieth of December; Nan was sitting in the parlor late in the afternoon, with Georgie and Mary beside her, and a big pile of stockings waiting to be darned in the basket at her side. She was trying to work, but somehow her thoughts kept wandering away to Beverley. She could just imagine how delightfully they were preparing for Christmas. There would be genuine "fun" at College Street, and she felt sure that Aunt Letty would provide presents for Love and Mrs. Travers and little David. At thought of these Nan fairly broke down; her tears were falling on the stockings, when Georgie cried out,

"Hi! there's a hack before the door! Who's that, Nan?"

Nan hastily dried her eyes and looked out of the window. It *was* a hack. Could it be Mrs. Heriot who descended? Nan's very heart stood still. She sprang up, holding her work in her hands as in a vise. Mary and Georgie fled away down-stairs to know who the visitor was, and so Nan was left alone in the little parlor.

Five minutes seemed to pass before the door opened, and then Mrs. Heriot came hurrying in, and in a second Nan was clasped in her motherly arms.

"Oh, my child! my dearie!" the good woman exclaimed. "Whatever was wrong is right now! and they can't wait to get you home again quick enough. Come, haste! get your little hat on, and come."

But for the first time in her life Nan had fainted dead away. When she opened her eyes, it was to see Mrs. Rupert and Mrs. Heriot bending over her with a collection of horribly smelling restoratives; but the first thing she did was to smile from sheer happiness.

"I think, mem, if you please," Mrs. Heriot was saying, in iciest tones, to Aunt Rupert, "we'll get her down to the hotel, where her cousin, Miss Phyllis Rolf, is waiting for her."

Mrs. Rupert was very much impressed, particularly by the box of Christmas presents Mrs. Heriot had brought with her for the entire household; and she facilitated Nan's departure, saying nothing more unpleasant than "Well, I hope they'll either keep her or leave her once and for all this time."

But Nan was too dreamily happy to care for anything Mrs. Rupert could do or say now. Once more she drove down the streets of Bromfield on her way to Beverley.



NAN FAINTS IN MRS. HERIOT'S ARMS.

Everything seemed confused ; but it was clear enough that they stopped at the big country hotel on Main Street, went up-stairs and into a cheerful room, where Phyllis stood waiting. How differently her cousin met her this time from the first ! Then, Phyllis had been all condescension and superiority ; but now she opened her arms, clasped Nan in them, and murmured, lovingly,

“ Oh, my dear child, you must forgive us—we understand it all, and never again shall you go away.”

This one half-hour would have seemed joy enough to Nan ; but it was delightful to have a cosey tea with Phyllis, and then, before they went to bed, to hear how Aunt Letty was ardently expecting her “ home again.”

Phyllis did not ask Nan why she had not spoken of Laura’s deceit. She knew well what had governed the humbler cousin ; and Nan was content to know the merest outlines of what Laura had done. It was, indeed, enough that all was explained, and that they wanted her home again at Beverley.

Meanwhile, at Rolf House, Aunt Letty was in a state of genuine excitement. Her darling was coming back, and great had been the preparations for her return. To Laura Miss Rolf had said very little, for the girl’s remorse and penitence were entirely sincere. She begged so humbly to be allowed to help prepare for Nan’s return, that Miss Rolf

had kept her with her, and her dear Love Blake was there too, to whom Laura seemed to cling as to something or somebody who suggested Nan.

There was a great deal of dusting and moving about of furniture in a large, sunny room near Nan's school-room, and which had always been closed except for certain elderly visitors. Indeed, Nan had rarely seen it. Everything was what she called "stuffy" in it; but had she looked in on the work going on there during these days, she would have changed her mind.

Rolf House once again! As the carriage turned up the well-known drive, Nan hardly knew whether to believe she was really wide awake; but the sight of the lighted windows, the door, flung open by eager hands, was real enough, and when a moment later she found herself in the hall, clasped close to her aunt's heart, there was no longer possibility for fancying it a dream.

"We are glad to have you home again, my dear," was all that Aunt Letty said, but Nan looked up at her with satisfied eyes. She could afford in her happiness to turn to Laura, who was hanging back, with a very sweet word of greeting.

Between Miss Rolf and Laura a look was exchanged, and then the former said:

"Nan, Laura has been very busy helping us prepare a

room for you. Perhaps you would like to go up with her and see it."

Again came Nan's smile. It was a tearful little smile, and she could not trust herself to talk, but she slipped one hand into Laura's, and the two cousins went up-stairs.

Down past the old school-room Laura led her, and then opened the door of the room prepared for Nan's new welcome.

Nan could only stand still and gaze about her with delight. All the old furniture and hangings had been removed; instead were light, soft chintzes, cheerful pictures, furniture suited for comfort and use, a book-rack full of nice volumes, a standing work-basket with everything ready for use, and, finally, a little secretary with Nan's account-books on it, and all sorts of pretty stationery.

While Nan was gazing with delight and wonder upon all these treasures, Laura stole near her cousin, and said timidly:

"Nan, will you look at the dressing-table? I worked you those things."

And Nan looked, and saw a pretty set of muslin and blue silk articles, each worked with her name, and over the table was the one religious suggestion of the room. This was a framed text, as follows:

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

It was Miss Rolf who had asked Laura to buy this for Nan.

Laura's eyes were still very tearful when Nan, after joyfully looking at everything, turned again to her.

"Lollie," she said, "I do—let us both do it—always!"

And so Nan felt she had, indeed, come "home again."

Laura did not remain at Rolf House for supper. Miss Rolf and Nan took it together, and pleasantly discussed Christmas, and what Nan would like to do on that day. And afterwards, in the dear, familiar black-walnut room, aunt and niece sat together until ten o'clock, and Miss Rolf told Nan how her feeling that she was not upright had grieved her, and how she rejoiced that she could claim her again without stain of such sin.

Wisely enough, Miss Rolf did not make a heroine or a martyr of Nan, for she felt that the child had not used good judgment in her reticence, but she made her keenly see how she regretted all injustice done to her, and certainly nothing could have exceeded Miss Rolf's tenderness to her niece. It seemed as if she had closed the door on the warm place in her heart to open it again only for little Nan.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE next few days passed like some happy dream in Nan's life. All the joyousness and tenderness of the Christmas season seemed in the very air she breathed, and hours of every day were devoted to preparations for the great festival. Miss Rolf had determined to make this an important occasion. She issued invitations for a large party in Nan's honor; and she intended to impress upon every one the fact that her niece was henceforth to be considered her adopted daughter—the young mistress of Rolf House. Nan went about with a happy light shining in her eyes, but her aunt, who watched her critically, could not see that the sudden change in her circumstances had made her over-exultant. She seemed chiefly delighted by the fact of again being “at home”—near to the Rolfs, first and last; able again to plan for Mrs. Travers and David; to have chats with Love Blake, and to know that the approaching Christmas would bring a “good time” for her friends, both rich and humble.

Her new room was a source of the greatest delight to

her, and she never tired of sitting in the pretty easy-chairs, reading the books, or admiring and using the contents of her desk and work-table. And in these days it came about that Laura spent most of her time on the large chintz-covered lounge, drawn up at one side of the wood fire; for Laura's malady was increasing so fast that they all feared it must settle into a hopeless spinal complaint. There was nothing dangerous in it, but it might be that for some time she would be a prisoner, and Aunt Letty, Phyllis, and Nan all decided that it was best to say very little of her wrongdoing to her. In the long quiet hours of her suffering and weakness she was learning more than she could have done in years of health and vigor; and, more than any one but Nan could have believed possible, was she suffering from honest shame and penitence. Nan and Joan would bring their Christmas work to this bright fireside, while Laura lay still, enjoying their gay talk, and for the first time learning to understand the sweetness and generosity of Nan's nature. The younger girls asked her opinion about everything, except some very privately executed articles which were intended as surprises for Laura's own Christmas.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Heriot, on the morning of the 23d—"I suppose we'll have to prepare for a hundred people at least. Dear, dear! it's a long time since we've had such doings. And just think: first the Christmas tree—and then

the party—and then dinner the next day—and—well—I don't know *how* we are to get through it all!"

Nan laughed gayly. She and Joan were in the store-room tying up greens, while Mrs. Heriot was making out a list to be sent to the grocer's and confectioner's.

"*I know*," said Nan; "we'll get through with it perfectly beautifully. We'll all be so happy—and I hope," she added, half sighing, "we'll all see fifty more such Christmases."

"Just hear the child!" exclaimed Mrs. Heriot. "Oh, I quite forgot, my dear; Miss Rolf wants you for a moment up-stairs."

Nan darted up willingly enough, and found Miss Rolf in her own room, looking very pleased, and with the kindly smile Nan loved to see in her eyes and on her lips.

"See here, Nannie," she said, drawing her niece towards her, "I'm going to tell you something. It was I who had your Cousin Philip sent to school."

"Oh!" gasped Nan—and then she gave Miss Rolf rather an alarming squeeze—"Oh, Aunt *Letty*!"

"I had it done through Mr. Field so that he might not, later in life, feel under any special obligations to us. And now I want to speak of your Cousin Marian. Of course they are not really any kin to you; but, after all, they gave you as much as they could when you were homeless, and I should like to do well by them."

A strange little wondering look had come into Nan's face. "Aunt Letty," she said, suddenly, "will you tell me one thing truly? *What* had papa done that his grandfather should have cast him off?"

Miss Rolf looked pained. "My dear," she said, slowly, "he did not act openly with my father; he had debts which he tried to hide; he was never quite frank about anything; and so, at last, it came to an open quarrel. Nan, dear, you see that was what frightened me when I thought—you understand, my darling"—the old lady clasped Nan closely to her side—"I thought I could not live over again scenes such as we used to have with him—bright, lovable boy that he was—and that before I learned to love you too dearly I would send you away."

Nan was very silent for a moment. Her father was a dim memory to her, yet she could vaguely recall scenes which she now understood better; times when debt seemed to be her mother's horror, and when her father, recklessly extravagant, would leave them alone and often hungry.

"*It shall never be, Aunt Letty,*" Nan said, firmly. And Miss Rolf understood her, and believed her child with all her heart.

"And about Marian," said Aunt Letty. "I thought of suggesting that if she liked to go for three years to a good

school I would pay the expenses—I mean *all* her expenses—what do you think?”

Nan’s whole face brightened. “Oh, Aunt Letty!” she exclaimed, “how like you! Then we could see for ourselves just what a fair chance would do for her.”

“And what do you say,” continued Miss Rolf, smiling, “to asking her here for Christmas? I can make up my mind better then.”

“That would be—kind, I suppose,” said Nan, a little dubiously; but in a moment she was ashamed of her own hesitation, and gave a heartier assent.

“Do you know, aunt,” she said, “that nice, quiet Mrs. Leigh, who taught me at Bromfield, wants to open a school in Exeter, and Mrs. Grange and some other people are getting pupils for her. Now, she knows Marian so well, why wouldn’t that be a good beginning?”

“Very good,” said Miss Rolf, after a moment’s thought; “I might write to Mrs. Leigh about it. Now, run away, my darling. I hope you and Joan are not working your fingers actually to the bone.”

Nan laughed, and darted off to tell Joan the last piece of news. And before the next morning an answer had come, accepting Miss Rolf’s invitation for Marian.

Nan could imagine the satisfaction with which Marian told her companions of her great good luck, but she hoped

she would be moderate in her display of bugles and bangles at the Christmas party.

But Miss Rolf's thoughtfulness had gone further even than Nan's. Marian was expected about two o'clock on Christmas eve, and in the morning two boxes arrived from Ames's, the contents of which only Nan and Miss Rolf knew. One of these contained a pretty, ready-made, dark silk, which would, Nan thought, fit tolerably well, and might in any case be altered; and the other a perfectly simple, pale-blue cashmere, so ladylike and elegant, however, that Nan felt Marian would appear another being when dressed in it. These articles were hung up in the wardrobe of the little room near Nan's, which had been prepared for Marian's reception.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"THERE!" exclaimed Phyllis, triumphantly, from her place on a ladder in the hall at Rolf House. "There! the last bit of evergreen, thank goodness! and how does it look?"

The chorus of voices, young and old, from below declared it was a perfect success. And so it was. The fine old hall seemed to bloom with the freshness of evergreens and flowers, and at one end the huge tree was standing behind a screen, to be removed at the fitting moment after tea. Half a dozen of the invited guests had arrived—those who were to remain over Christmas-day—and Nan was now anxiously waiting Marian's appearance.

The door-bell gave a quick peal, and Nan turned around, her heart beating from a mixture of feelings about seeing Marian. A gust of wind, a little drift of snow, and then Marian's figure appeared.

Every one was very quiet while Miss Rolf, with her usual courtesy, went forward and said, "How do you do, my dear?" and the old lady's beautiful hand was extended and seized

rather boisterously by Marian. She had come here fully determined not to be "patronized" or "snubbed;" so, although everything she saw in that first glance was rather awe-inspiring, she said, with her jauntiest air,

"Well, yes, here I am, alive at least. How do you do, Nan? Putting up greens, are you?"

And the girl glanced confidently about her, staring at Phyllis on the ladder, at Joan and the boys congregated by the fireplace, and at Mrs. Heriot and old Robert, who were helping carefully here and there; finally her free gaze came back to Miss Rolf, and there something in the old lady's tranquil face and figure, with its air of absolute though unconscious dignity and good-breeding, seemed to check her loud voice and independent manner. She stood very still.

"Will you go up-stairs, my dear, with Nan?" said Miss Rolf's finely modulated voice again.

"Oh, yes, 'm—thank you, 'm." And Marian crossed the hall with Nan and went up the wide, curving staircase, looking down once in a while at the pleasantly active group below, and enjoying the sense of luxury and space and order about her, which seemed mingled with the delicious scent of the greens.

The two girls had to pass through Nan's room, and here Marian would have liked to stop and examine all the dainty furnishings and ornaments within it; but the sight of Laura

sleeping on the sofa made Nan hurry her cousin on, and into the comfortable little room assigned to her.

How to give her the dresses she hardly knew; but while Marian was busy at the mirror, taking off her hat and pulling down her "bangs," Nan said, rather timidly,

"Marian, we thought—aunt and I—that perhaps you'd have no time to prepare a party dress—and aunt bought these—if you like them."

Nan swung open the wardrobe door, and Marian turned around with an exclamation of delight. She felt no hesitation about the gift. Her eyes danced as she exclaimed,

"Well, I *never*!" and she was not ten minutes in getting her dress off, and flying into first one and then the other of the two pretty dresses. And it certainly was a comfort to see how much their simplicity improved her whole appearance.

Nan left Marian with Laura when the latter awoke, and went back to help with the Christmas preparations. Altogether, it was an enchanting afternoon. The Blakes and Traverses arrived early and were all comfortably ensconced in the black-walnut parlor, where Mrs. Heriot had a most sumptuous supper prepared for them. Little David having owned to a weakness for plum roll, there was enough there to satisfy a dozen of him; and Nan flitted in and out once or twice to make sure that her protégées had everything

they needed for perfect happiness and comfort. She declared afterwards that it was equal to any picture to see that table—Mrs. Heriot at the head, Love at the foot, and Mrs. Travers and David on either side, and between them all such a sparkling array of china and glass and silver as Robert was putting on the long table in the dining-room.

The supper-party in there was, to Nan, rather a formidable one, since there were present various new relations—an elderly cousin, Jane Marsh, and her two quiet daughters; a tall boy cousin, who teased her all the time, named Val Paton; and Mrs. Grange from Bromfield, and Dr. Rogers, whose eyes kept twinkling at Nan; and all the College Street Rolfs; and the minister, Mr. Harmen, and his delicate young daughter.

Just before supper Laura had been declared unable to come down, so Nan contrived an excuse and slipped away up-stairs with a plate of very nice good things for her cousin.

She sat on the low bench by the fire, while Laura slowly ate the cake and sweetmeats, so long that Laura finally exclaimed,

“There, Nan, it is half-past seven; you *must* go and dress.”

And Nan jumped up, and ran down-stairs to find Marian. That young person was engaged in a very animated conversation with Val Paton, and she looked as if she were

enjoying herself thoroughly. It was a new excitement, however, to go up-stairs and dress for the party. Nan stayed with her to give her any help needed, and when the last touches were put she could not but admit that Marian looked very well, and very much a "little lady." "And school," thought Nan, "will do the rest to her *manners*."

Nan's own toilet was speedily made. It was only a simple white mull with blue ribbons; but Mrs. Heriot stopped her in the corridor to make sure everything about "her bairn" was right.

I cannot describe all the delights and wonders of that Christmas party. First came the tree, when every one, servants and all, were gathered about, and Nan distributed the gifts. Of course all proved satisfactory, from the joint offering of the Rolfs—Nan included—to Aunt Letty, of a dainty blue-and-white tea-service, to little David's enormous army of tin soldiers, cannon, forts, and all warlike paraphernalia. There were not wanting useful presents as well—Marian had a set of furs, and Love Blake a fine winter jacket. As for Nan herself, she had what she prized most, an exquisite gold watch, with Aunt Letty's portrait on the inside. And then Phyllis's gift had a peculiar meaning. Nan had said to Aunt Letty, when the presents were talked over: "Aunt, I *do* want Phyllis to have something beautiful;" so together they had chosen a pearl necklace—just a

string of beautiful pearls, from which fell little, fine-pointed, glittering gold drops.

Phyllis was standing near the tree, looking very beautiful in her white lace dress, when Nan clasped the necklace about her slender white throat, and she did not see the tears that came into her cousin's eyes. Phyllis was thinking of how grandly *she* had expected to mould Nan to something worthy of her new position—and was it not from little Nan she had learned her deepest, purest lessons?

Of course the party was a success. By nine o'clock the rooms were all filled with a gay, laughing company, and the younger ones best enjoyed keeping by themselves. The band was stationed in the hall, and the young people danced in the walnut parlor, the utmost good cheer prevailing. Once in a while Nan ran up to report progress below to Laura, who had her presents on her sofa, and seemed to enjoy things from the distance.

It was midnight when all but the home party had dispersed. Nan had kept wishing Lance had been there, and Phyllis said, as they all gathered about the hall-fire, that she meant to write to him that very night. Marian looked as if she began to see something in life better than the attempt to be the most "stylish" of Mrs. Delille's "young ladies;" and Joan could only "hold on" to Nan, as she expressed it, declaring she was too happy to live!



"NAN CLASPED THE NECKLACE ABOUT HER SLENDER WHITE THROAT."

So with all these contented sentiments the party separated for their various rooms. Just before they went to bed Marian said to Nan, with a little, half-mortified laugh,

“See here—Nan, I don’t think you a *bit* stuck-up, as I thought you’d be, and I think it was awfully good of Miss Rolf to ask me.”

Little as it was, it pleased Nan greatly, and made her hopeful for the future.

Every one was in bed and, it might have been thought, asleep, but Nan felt wide awake, after the many excitements of the day.

It was a glorious night: although the ground was white with a covering of snow, the moon silvered everything, and Nan knelt in the window of her new room looking out with grateful eyes upon the place she now felt to be *really* home. She was thinking of so many things that she scarcely heard any sound within, until Phyllis’s step sounded just at her side, and there was her oldest cousin in her dressing-wrapper, and Nan welcomed her with a quickly outstretched hand.

Phyllis sat down by Nan in silence for a moment; then she said, very softly, “Nan, will you always help Laura—and Joan—and all of us?”

“Of course,” whispered Nan; “all I know how.”

The two cousins remained silent a little while longer, and then Nan said, looking out at the quiet snow in the moonlight,

“What were the words of that old Christmas hymn, Phyllis?—

‘And unto us a Child was born,
Whose mark of sorrow must be worn.’

Phyllis,” she added, “do you suppose we *must* all have sorrow?”

“Sometimes,” said Phyllis. “But, Nan, dear, I think it is going to be *your* path in life to help other people’s sorrows.”

“If I can be good enough—and wise enough,” answered Nan.

And then in a moment Phyllis kissed her good-night and went away, after a glance at Laura, sleeping in Nan’s bed.

How many changes had come, thought Phyllis, since with all pride and curiosity she had gone to Mrs. Rupert’s for Nan! Not one could have defined the child’s power among them; but I think that somewhere beyond the quiet starlit sky, at which Nan was gazing that Christmas morning, *One* knew—the gift of sweetness and truth given to her had not been wasted.

And so we will leave her, hoping, if we meet her again, it will be seen that Miss Rolf’s trust was not an idle one.

THE END.

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